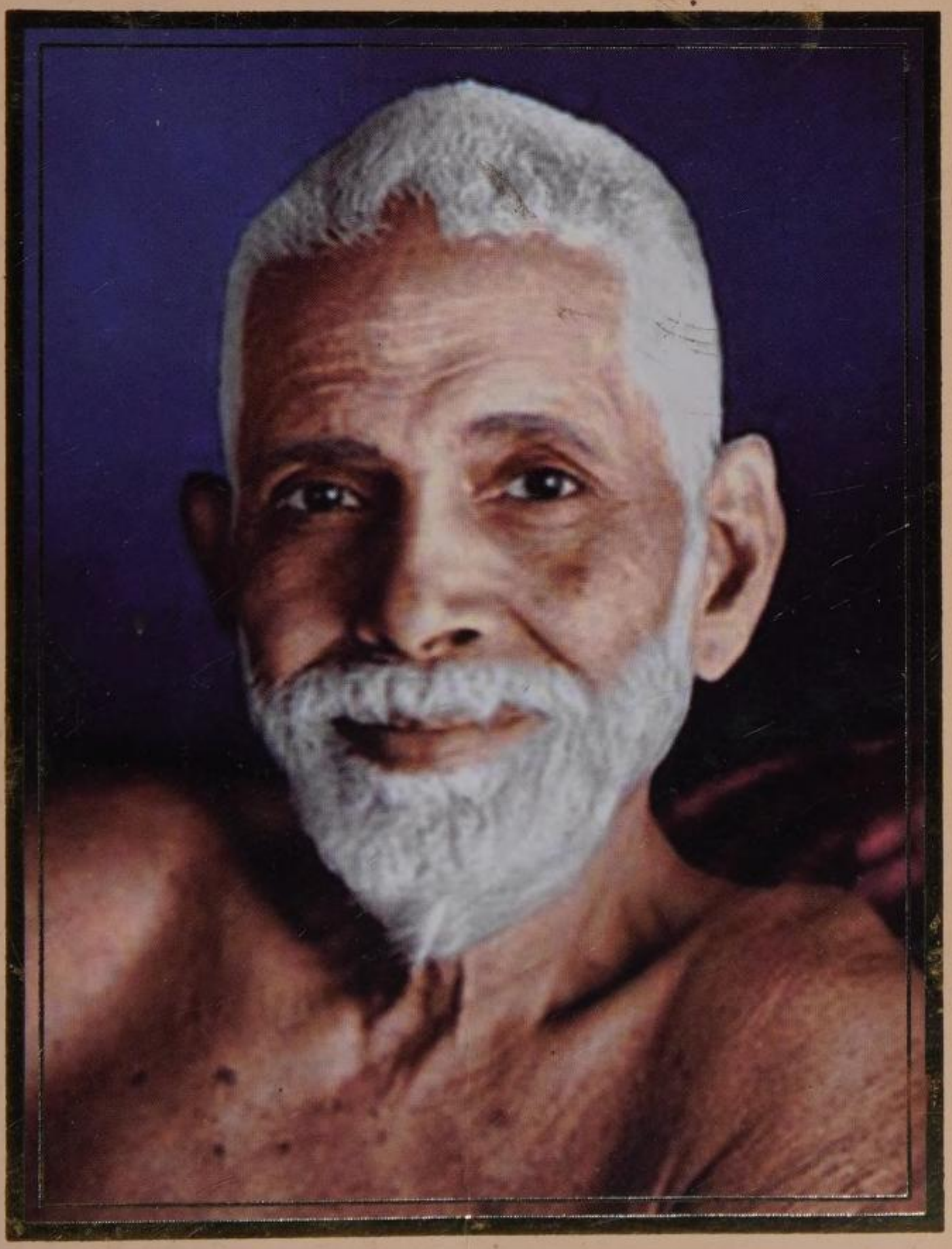
FACE TO FACE WITH SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

(Enchanting and Uplifting Reminiscences of 202 persons)



Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad

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IT

FACE TO FACE WITH

SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

Ode to Sri Ramana Maharshi

Eternity has worn a human face,
Contracted to a little human span,
Lo, the Immortal has become a man,
A self-imprisoned thing in time and space.

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya
pp. 63-4

FACE TO FACE WITH SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI

Enchanting and Uplifting Reminiscences of 202 persons

Compiled and Edited by

Professor Laxmi Narain

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(Monthly Journal of Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad)

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Department of Business Management,
Osmania University, Hyderabad.)

Foreword by

Padma Vibhushan **Dr. T. N. Chaturvedi**

Formerly Governor of Karnataka

2009

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PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

The pages that follow contain first-hand experiences of a hundred and sixty (160) individuals, including twenty eight foreigners from across the globe, who visited / interacted with Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950). Some of these persons also had an opportunity to serve / live with him. The book provides a comprehensive, not exhaustive, record of such experiences. The figure 160 is the extent to which *we could go*!

The number of beneficiaries of the Maharshi's grace while he was in the mortal frame is very large, but the limitation as usual was lack of inclination and inspiration of the individuals to record the event. We are indeed grateful to the chroniclers for leaving behind a record of experiences of their visits / stay at the Ashram.

The reminiscences tell us about the Maharshi's philosophy, his teachings and his love for all living beings, including animals and plants. They reveal how sincere aspirants felt the impact of the irresistible light of the Maharshi's eyes which penetrated their inner being, and also how the peace and bliss got transmitted through celestial vibrations released by the Maharshi's presence.

Many write-ups in the book bring out the Maharshi as a perfect being, notwithstanding the overpowering and debilitating *vrittis* (tendencies) inherent in human beings. This is indeed unique, as even our *avatars* could not always transcend the constraints of their physical form. Many descriptions in the text make us feel that the *jivanmukta* (emancipated while yet in the physical body) and the *sthitaprajna* (a person of steadfast wisdom) as envisoned in our scriptures, are not mere concepts but the reality authenticated by the Maharshi.

The encomiums showered upon the Maharshi by the contibutors make the reader recall Einstein's historic tribute to Mahatma Gandhi: "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth."

The reader of these pages will discover that spirituality is not something vague and uncertain but substantial and proven as got manifested in the Maharshi.

The text offers an insight into the myriad dimensions of the life at the Maharshi's *ashrams* on the Arunachala hill and in its vicinity. It

also helps us to understand the Maharshi's philosophy, which is to achieve Self-realisation through persistent and intensive introspection on the basic question *Who am I*? It is essentially the same approach as enunciated by celebrated Greek philosopher Socrates (469-399 B.C.) – "*Man know thyself. The unexamined life is not worth living.*"

The reminiscences presented here have no particular order and are independent of each other. They begin with the chronicler's brief biographical sketch, which sounds limited in many cases due to lack of information. This is because many devotees have chosen the tradition of underplaying the self.

The views and experiences of the chroniclers have at places been edited to make the presentation incisive and precise.

Some sentences in the text signifying the exalted state of the Maharshi are in bold face, at our instance. The word 'Ashram' when it refers to Sri Ramanasramam, is with capital 'A'.

Many chroniclers have reverently referred to Sri Ramana as Bhagavan, the title by which he was widely known during his life time. Some authors have also used capital letters, e.g., He or His, while referring to the Maharshi.

The text is almost wholly based on the publications of Sri Ramanasramam,Tiruvannamalai; Ramana Maharshi Centre for Learning, Bangalore; and David Godman's three-part *The Power Of The Presence – Transforming Encounters with Sri Ramana Maharshi*. We feel deeply indebted to these sources for their permission to use the material.

Glossary at the end is intended to explain non-English, italicised words. It also contains brief notes on important Sanskrit and Tamil works referred to in the text. *References of the Sources of Material Used* furnish details of source in each case. This is followed by *Alphabetical List of Contributors.*

Index is preceded by a collection of *Accolades Showered upon Sri Ramana*, which seem to defy all laudations and extolments.

I am grateful to Padma Vibhushan awardee Dr. T.N. Chaturvedi, Governor of Karnataka and formerly Comptroller and Auditor-General of India, for acceding to my request to write the Foreword.

I am thankful to Dr. V. Ramadas Murthy for his meticulous proof reading, and to Smt. Lalitha Krithivasan, Sri V. Krithivasan, Sri N.S. Ramamohan, Sri P.S. Sundaram, Sri C.R.P. Setty, Prof. Shiv K. Kumar,

Prof. M. Sivaramakrishna, Sri David Godman, Sri J. Jayaraman, Dr. Sushma Narayan and others for their help in the preparation of this book.

I sincerely thank Sri N.S. Ramamohan and Smt. Uma Sudhakar Rayilla – self-effacing and sincere devotees of our Kendram, Sri Nrupender Rao, Chairman, Pennar Industries Ltd., Hyderabad, and my daughter Dr. Sushma Narayan, a paediatrician in Delhi, for funding the production cost of the book. Thanks are due to them all the more because they would not have liked to be identified.

The printing cost of the book is an offering to Sri Ramana by my former student Sri Vijay R. Raghavan of Sai Security Printers Ltd., New Delhi, who deserves my sincere thanks.

The photographs in the book are an offering to Sri Ramana from my son-in-law Sri Sanjiv Narayan, for which I am thankful to him.

This book is a humble offering at the feet of Sri Ramana Maharshi on his 125th *jayanti*, which is also the Silver Jubilee Year of Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad.

Laxmi Narain
(profnarain@yahoo.com)

Notes:

1. Chinnaswami alias Niranjananandaswami was *sarvadhikari* (chief manager) of Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai from 1928 to 1953. At present, the chief of the Ashram is called 'President'. Sri Ramana Maharshi, who attained *mahanirvana* in April 1950, continues to be the sole spiritual head.
2. *The Mountain Path* is being published quarterly by Sri Ramanasramam, since 1964. The journal *The Call Divine,* devoted to Sri Ramana Maharshi, published from Bombay, first appeared in 1952 and ceased publication in 1975.
3. David Godman, a Britisher who made Tiruvannamalai his home in 1976, has made substantial and valuable contribution to Sri Ramana literature.

The Ashram's web site is: www.sriramanamaharshi.org

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

The addition of 42 reminiscences takes the total to 202 (101+101). The effort is to have a comprehensive collection of the impressions, feelings, and experiences of those who had the privilege of being in the vicinity of Sri Ramana – the Maharshi.

The chroniclers added in this edition include Sri C. Rajagopalachari (no.192) and Sri Apa B. Pant (no.199). They later served as Governor-General of India, and India's High Commissioner in U.K., respectively. Sri Shankarlal Banker (no.167), a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, regularly communicated his elevating experiences to the Mahatma. Of the five foreigners – one each was from U.K. (no.173), France (no.175) and Poland (no.194). The two from U.S.A. (nos. 163 & 198), stayed at the Ashram for three years, and one of them (Sri Robert Adams) devoted himself to preach Sri Ramana's philosophy back home.

The reminiscences provide an insight into the spiritual height of the twentieth century *maharshi*, who was self-obliteration personified, and who spoke through silence. A British journalist records, "I like him greatly because he is so simple and modest, when an atmosphere of authentic greatness lies so palpably around him." (P. 18) One can easily count up the number of words he uses in a single day." (P. 17)

As before, the reminiscences have no particular order and are independent of each other. While retaining the original contents, the matter has been edited as necessary.

My thanks are due to many for their willing help and support. In particular, I am indebted to Smt. Lalitha Krithivasan, Sri V. Krithivasan, Sri P.S. Sundaram, Prof. M. Sivaramakrishna, Sri T.V. Chandramouli, Sri David Godman, Sri G. Srihari Rao, Sri Ramamani, Sri J. Jayaraman, Sri N.S. Ramamohan and Sri V.S. Ramanan.

I am beholden to my former student Sri Vijay R. Raghavan whose Sai Security Printers at Faridabad, has been considering the printing cost as an offering to the Maharshi.

Laxmi Narain
(profnarain@yahoo.com)

GOVERNOR
KARNATAKA

RAJ BHAVAN
BANGALORE

FOREWORD

Sri Ramana Maharshi is one of the unique shining stars on the spiritual firmament of our country which is legitimately proud of its rich and variegated heritage as well as of its saints, seers and sages from times immemorial.

As a young boy in quest of self-realisation Ramana Maharshi arrived in Tiruvannamalai (Tamil Nadu) and lived on or near the sacred hill – Arunachala, for a contiunous period of 54 years, till he left the body. He mostly kept silence but his silence was eloquent in that it attracted seekers from far and wide. He was looked upon by many as an incarnation of Lord Siva in the form of Dakshinamurthi. [*See* annexure-V, p. 415.]

The Maharshi's message is the summation and essence of the teachings of our ancient scriptures.

The Maharshi's luminous personality radiated serenity and provided solace to those who approached him. The doubts and skepticism of many would just vanish by the glow of his eyes. Always resting in the depths of his own inner self, his very glance will many times answer and resolve the questions that the visitors and devotees would have liked to ask.

The Maharshi was neither a philosopher nor a preacher but a realised soul. People of great distinction and knowledge have testified to it. His teachings, focused on the query "Who am I", are both simple and profound. They are largely contained in his pithy replies to the questions put before him or doubts expressed by the seekers.

Over the years Ramana literature, both biographical and philosophical, has grown and is growing. The present book *Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi* belongs to both categories. It contains the living testimony of those who came in touch with or had the good fortune to have the Maharshi's *darshan* and could feel the elevating and enlightening impact of his magnetic presence. The compilation contains extracts from their writings, bearing witness to what the Maharshi meant to them and how they got illumined in their spiritual quest.

The book representing the extensive and deep study of the compiler-editor, Prof. Laxmi Narain is not merely scholastic but imbued with *shraddha* (reverential faith). Wherever deemed necessary, apart from providing biographical information, he has given annotations which facilitate better comprehension of the significance of Ramana Maharshi to the common reader. This book is certainly a companion to one seeking the path. It is indeed a valuable addition to the growing corpus of Ramana literature.

Prof. Laxmi Narain is presently the Chief Editor of *Sri Ramana Jyothi*, monthly journal of Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad, as a labour of love. He is a highly reputed economist and his pioneering and path-breaking books on public sector or state undertakings and their different aspects brought him great renown in the country and abroad. Decades back I met him and got to know him in that capacity. It came as a pleasant surprise when he asked me to write a foreword to the present compilation which he has so labouriously and imaginatively prepared. I feel deeply touched by this unmerited honour and would like to express my thanks to my learned friend, Prof. Laxmi Narain.

I believe that the book will have the welcome that it richly deserves by its discerning readers and devotees. With this earnest hope I commend this work of Prof. Laxmi Narain which seems to me to be the sublime, symbolic and subtle vehicle of the Grace of Ramana Maharshi which may always abide with him and with us all.

June 26, 2005 **T.N. CHATURVEDI**

Padma Vibhushan awardee Dr. Triloki Nath Chaturvedi is a rare blend of administrative, academic, political, accounting, spiritual and governing distinctions. He was Secretary, Ministry of Education and Culture and thereafter Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India. He is Chairman of the premier research and training institute of the country in the area of public administration – Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, and was the editor of its prestigious journal for 28 years. Doctorates *honoris causa* have been conferred upon him by Punjab University, Chandigarh, and by Lal Bahadur Shastri Sanskrit Vidyapeeth, New Delhi, a deemed university. He was Comptroller and Auditor-General of India for six years. Elected to the Rajya Sabha in 1992 and reelected in 1998, he was a member of the panel to preside as vice-chairman of the Rajya Sabha. He was Chairman of Parliament's Standing Committee on Industry. He was a member of the Executive Board of the UNESCO, and was President, Shri Ramana Kendra, New Delhi, for more than a decade.

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4. Justice K.Sundaram Chettiar, B.A., B.L., was High Court Judge, Madras. 27
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9. B.Sanjiva Rao, B.A. (Cantab.) belonged to the pre-Independence Indian Educational Service. 33
10. Justice N.Chandrasekhara Aiyar was High Court Judge, Madras. 34
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13. Dr. C. Kunhan Raja was Director of the Adyar Library, Theosophical Society, Madras. 37
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15. Ella Maillart was a Swiss travel writer and photographer. ... 40
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17. T.M.Krishnaswami Aiyar, B.A., B.L., was Chief Justice of the former Travancore State (Kerala). 43
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20. Giridhari Lal belonged to Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry. 45
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22. Oliver Lacombe was L'Attache Culturel, Consulat General de France, Calcutta. 47
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28. C.S.Bagi, M.A., was Principal, Lingaraj College, Belgaum (Karnataka). 57
29. Rudra Raj Pande, M.A., was Principal, Tri-Chandra College, Nepal. 59
30. Prof. S.V.Ram, M.A., Ph.D., was Head, Dept. of Political Science, Lucknow University. 61
31. Chinta Dikshitulu, B.A., L.T., was a distinguished Telugu author. 62
32. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, a poet and artiste, was younger brother of Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India. 63
33. Dr. K. Subrahmanian was Professor of English, Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad. He was the Founder President of Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad. 65
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42. Major A.W.Chadwick O.B.E., who became Sadhu Arunachala, lived in the Ashram from 1935 to 1962. He authored *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi.* 110

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95. N.N.Rajan (N.Nataraja Iyer) was Station Master, Tiruvannamalai. 249
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SRI RAMANA MAHARSHI – A LIFE SKETCH

Birth and Early Years

Venkataraman (later Sri Ramana Maharshi) was born on December 30, 1879 at Tiruchuzhi, a small village in Tamil Nadu, some thirty miles off Madurai and eighteen miles from Virudhunagar, the nearest railway station. Venkataraman's mother Alagamma was a pious, devoted person and his father Sundaram Ayyar was a pleader, who practised mostly before the local magistrate. Venkataraman had a brother, two years his senior. His other brother and his sister were both younger to him by a few years. It was a happy, well-to-do middle class family.

When Venkataraman was twelve, Sundaram Ayyar died and the family was broken up. He and his elder brother were sent to live with their paternal uncle, Subbier, who had a house in Madurai. Here, Venkataraman first attended the Scott's Middle School and then joined the American Mission High School for his ninth standard. At school, his one asset was an amazingly retentive memory, which enabled him to repeat a lesson after hearing it just once.

Endowed with a stronger constitution than most of his classmates and with a spirit of independence that marked him off from other students, Venkatraman found school games and outdoor life more congenial than studies and reading books.

In his boyhood years Venkataraman was prone to abnormally deep sleep. Speaking about it in later years he said: "The boys didn't dare to touch me when I was awake, but if they had any grudge against me they would come when I was asleep, carry me wherever they liked, beat me, paint my face with charcoal and then put me back, and I would know nothing how it happened until they told me next morning."

The Origin of his Awakening

In November 1895, an elderly relation spoke to Venkataraman about his visit to Arunachala, the sacred hill in Tiruvannamalai,

Tamil Nadu. The word 'Arunachala' somehow had evoked in him since childhood an inexplicable awe and love. He enquired from the relative the whereabouts of Arunachala and ever afterwards found himself haunted by its thoughts.[1]

A little later, a copy of the *Periapuranam* fell into Venkataraman's hands. This *purana* contains stories of sixty-three Tamil saints who could secure Lord Siva's grace by their exemplary devotion. As Venkataraman read the book, he was overwhelmed with ecstatic wonder that such faith, such love and such divine fervour was at all possible.The tales of renunciation leading to Divine union filled him with awe and admiration. Something greater than all dream lands, was proclaimed real and possible in the book.[2]

From that time onwards, the spiritual current of awareness began to waken up in the young boy. This grew ever stronger with the passage of time and after a few months, sometime in the middle of July 1896, when he was just sixteen and a half years old, Venkataraman realised the Self in a miraculous manner. Years later, he described the event himself in the following words:

About six weeks before I left Madurai for good, a great change took place in my life. It was quite sudden. I was sitting alone in a room in my uncle's house, when a sudden fear of death overtook me. There was nothing in my state of health to account for it. I just felt, 'I am going to die' and began thinking about it. The fear of death drove my mind inwards and I said to myself mentally, 'Now that death has come; what does it mean? What is it that is dying? Only this body dies.' And at once I dramatised the occurrence of death. I held my breath and kept my lips tightly closed and said to myself, 'This body is dead. It will be carried to the cremation ground and reduced to ashes. But with the death of this body am I dead? Is this body 'I'? I am the spirit transcending the body. That means I am the deathless *atman*.'

What happened next is difficult to comprehend, though easy to describe. Venkataraman seemed to fall into a profound conscious trance wherein he became merged into the very source of selfhood, the very essence of Being. He quite clearly perceived and imbibed the truth that the body was a thing apart from the *atman* that remained untouched by death.

Venkataraman emerged from this amazing experience an utterly changed person. He lost interest in studies, sports, friends and so on. His chief interest now centered in the sublime consciousness of the true Self,

which he had found so unexpectedly. He enjoyed an inward serenity and a spiritual strength, *which never left him.*

The new mode of consciousness transformed Venkataraman's sense of values and his habits. Things he esteemed earlier had now lost their appeal. In his words: "Another change that came over me was that I no longer had any likes or dislikes with regard to food. Whatever was given to me, tasty or insipid, I would swallow with total indifference."

Leaving the House for Arunachala

Venkataraman's uncle and elder brother became critical of his changed mode of life, which seemed to them utterly impractical. Then came the tangible crisis on August 29, 1896. Venkataraman was then studying in tenth standard, preparing for his public examination. His teacher had given him an exercise in English grammar to be written three times. He copied it out twice and was about to do so for the third time when the futility of it struck him so forcibly that he pushed the papers away and, sitting cross-legged, abandoned himself to meditation. His elder brother who was watching this, scolded him for behaving like a yogi while still staying in the family and pretending to study. Such remarks had been made constantly during the last few weeks, and had gone unnoticed. But this time they went home. "Yes", thought Venkataraman, "What business have I here?" And immediately came the thought of Arunachala that had caused such a thrill in him a few months ago. He decided then and there to discover the fabulous and legendary Arunachala of his dreams.

Venkataraman knew that it was necessary to use some guile because his family would never otherwise let him go. So he told his brother that he had to attend a special class at the school. Unintentionally providing him with funds for the journey, his brother said, "Take five rupees from the box and pay my college fees." Venkataraman took only three rupees, no more than what he thought was necessary for reaching Tiruvannamalai. In the note he left (which fortunately is preserved), he wrote in Tamil:

"I have set out in quest of my Father in accordance with His command. It is on a virtuous enterprise that 'this' has embarked, therefore let none grieve over this act and let no money be spent in search of 'this'. Your college fees have not been paid. Two rupees are enclosed." The note ended with the word 'Thus', and a dash — in place of his signature.

It is significant that the opening sentence in the note began with 'I', but later Venkataraman used 'this' in reference to himself.Thus, what left Madurai for Tiruvannamalai was not the spirit, which had already got absorbed in the Lord, but the body, now viewed as distinct from the spirit. The personality which began with 'I', got merged into 'this', and at the end there was no person left to sign; hence the note remained unsigned.[3] The note made it clear that the writer was driven by a Divine command, which had to be obeyed.

Reaching Tiruvannamalai on the early morning of September 1, 1896, after a series of trials and tribulations, Venkataraman went straight to the great Arunachaleswara temple[4] and stood before his Father. His cup of bliss was now full to the brim. It was the journey's end, and his homecoming. [For a view of the temple, *see* photograph no. 2 in the book.]

Tranced Years and Fresh Moorings

Coming out of the temple, the youth got his head shaven and threw away *all* his belongings and clothes except for a strip he tore off his *dhoti* to serve as a loincloth. Thus renouncing everything, he went back to the temple complex and got immersed in the Bliss of Being, sitting motionless, day after day, night after night.

One Seshadri Swami, a learned ascetic of high spiritual attainment, took it upon himself to look after Brahmana Swami, as Venkataraman began to be called. Some schoolboys started throwing stones at him as they were intrigued to see someone not much older than themselves sitting like a statue. And as one of them put it later, he wanted to find out whether he was real or not. To avoid the situation, Brahmana Swami took shelter in the Patala Lingam, an underground small Siva shrine within the enormous temple complex, where ants and vermin fed on his flesh during the weeks he spent there. But the young Swami, absorbed in bliss, remained unmoved.

When some devotees discovered the Swami in the vault, oblivious of the dreadful condition he was in, with worm-infested wounds and oozing pus, they removed him to a nearby shrine within the temple complex. From then on, he continued to move within the complex to various other shrines and groves away from curious onlookers. In all these places, he was looked after by mendicants, devotees from the town, temple functionaries and others. He continued to remain absorbed

in the Self and was virtually dead to the world: he had to be shaken by the shoulders before he would accept water or food, which some devotees brought for him.

Years later, the Maharshi recalled how he had been forcibly administered a bath by a motherly devotee, the first in four months after his arrival in Tiruvannamalai. It was twelve months later that another such devotee gave him a second bath. Likewise, his hair remained uncut and his face unshaven for some eighteen months. He told Suri Nagamma (no. 39): "The hair had got matted and woven like a basket. Small stones and dust had settled in it and the head used to feel heavy. I had long nails and a frightful appearance. When some people pressed me to have a shave, I yielded. When my head was shaven clean, I began to wonder whether I had a head or not, I felt so light."

In February 1897, the young Swami was removed to the Gurumurtam – a *math,* some distance away from the town, where he lived for about nineteen months. He continued to remain Self-absorbed and was looked after mainly by a *sadhu* named Uddandi Nayanar and his friend Annamalai Thambiran. Pilgrims and sightseers began to throng the *math* and many would prostrate themselves before the Swami, some with prayers for boons and some out of pure reverence.

As the crowd became large, a bamboo fence was put around the Swami's seat to prevent the public from touching him.There was no difficulty about food, as several devotees wished to supply it regularly; the more pressing need was to keep away the crowd of sightseers and visitors.

About this time, a Malayalee *sadhu* named Palaniswami, living in great austerity, was devoting his life to the worship of Lord Vinayaka. One day his friend Srinivasa Iyer told him, "Why do you spend your life with this stone swami? There is a young swami in flesh and blood at the Gurumurtam. He is steeped in *tapas* like the young Dhruva. If you go there and attach yourself to him, your life will attain its purpose." When Palaniswami went to the *math,* he was stirred to his depths at the very sight of the Swami and felt that he had discovered his saviour. He devoted the remaining twenty-one years of his life serving the Maharshi as his attendant.

As the Swami's body was utterly neglected, it got weakened to the limits of endurance. When he needed to go out, he had barely the strength to rise. Many times it so happened that he would raise himself by a few inches and then sink back again.

One Venkatarama Iyer, head accountant in a government office in the town, used to visit the Swami everyday before going to his work. One day, he placed before him a sheet of paper and a pencil and besought him to write his name and place of origin. When the Swami made no response to his pleading, he declared that he would neither eat nor go to office till he received the desired information. Then Sri Ramana wrote in English 'Venkataraman, Tiruchuzhi'. His knowledge of English came as a surprise.

Search for the Lost Boy and Mother's Visit

In the meantime, Venkataraman's relatives were making anxious enquiries and searches at various places, but he could not be traced. Annamalai Thambiran (mentioned in the second para of the previous page), who had learnt the young Swami's name and native place at the *math,* happened to visit Madurai. He spoke to one of Venkataraman's family friends about the well-known young saint at Tiruvannamalai who belonged to Tiruchuzhi. Immediately after getting this information, Venkataraman's uncle set off for Tiruvannamalai. He pleaded in vain for the Swami's return and left for Madurai empty-handed.

After sometime, the young Swami began to reside at the Pavalakunru shrine on the Arunachala hill, where also he would sit as before, immersed in the Bliss of Being. It was here that mother Alagamma came to take back her son, whom she recognised despite his wasted body and matted hair. With a mother's love and concern, she lamented over his condition and pressed him to go back with her, but he sat unmoved despite her repeated entreaties. One day, pouring out her grief to the devotees around him, she beseeched them to intervene. Seized by the mother's plight, one of them told the Swami, "Your mother is weeping and praying; at least give her an answer. The Swami need not break his vow of silence, but he could certainly write what he has to say."

Venkataraman took a pencil and wrote in Tamil: "The Ordainer controls the fate of souls in accordance with their *prarabdha-karma.*[5] Whatever is destined not to happen will not happen, try hard as you may. Whatever is destined to happen will happen, do what you may to prevent it.This is certain. The best course, therefore, is to remain silent."

The last sentence applied to the mother, who was asking what could not be granted. It applies to people in general in the sense that 'it is no use kicking against the pricks,' opposing the destiny that cannot be

altered. But it does not mean that utmost sincere efforts to succeed are not made. The man who says, "Everything is predestined, therefore I need make no effort", is indulging in the wrong and tricky assumption that he knows what is predestined. The mother returned home and the Swami remained absorbed in the Self, as before.

The Swami Moves to Virupaksha Cave

Early in 1899, the young ascetic, accompanied by his attendant Palaniswami took up his residence in the Virupaksha Cave, named after the thirteenth century saint Virupakshadeva, whose remains lie buried there.The cave is curiously shaped to resemble the sacred monosyllable OM, the tomb being in the inner recess. He stayed in this cave for about seventeen years. [*See* photograph nos. 3 (i) & (ii) and 4 (i) in the book.]

Here also the young Swami maintained silence for the first few years. His radiance had already drawn a group of devotees around him and an ashram had come into being. He occasionally wrote out instructions and explanations for his disciples, but his silence did not impede their training because his most effective way of imparting instruction was through the unspoken word. The penetrating silence became the hallmark of the young sage, as indicated on pages mentioned under the head 'Silence of M' in Index.

Some Early Visitors

Sivaprakasam Pillai (no. 45), an officer in the Revenue Department and an intellectual, heard of the young Swami residing on the hill. At his very first visit in 1902, he was captivated by the Swami's aura and became his life-long devotee. As the Swami was maintaining silence he answered fourteen questions of Pillai by writing on a slate. These were later expanded and arranged in a book form *Who am I?* This is perhaps the most widely appreciated prose exposition of the Maharshi's philosophy.

Ganapati Muni (no. 91), a renowned Sanskrit scholar and poet, was another devotee who visited the Swami from 1903 onwards and accepted him as his guru in 1907. It was the grateful Muni who named the Swami as Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, and sang of him as an incarnation of Subrahmanya, son of Lord Siva. The Maharishi's answers to the questions put by the Muni and his disciples, largely constitute the well-known work *Ramana Gita*. The most quoted *sloka* of this book (II. 2) tells us: In the interior of the Heart-Cave [right hand side of the

chest, not left] *Brahman* alone shines in the form of *atman*. Enter deep into the Heart with a questioning mind, or by diving deep within, or with breath under check, and abide in the *atman.*

The earliest Western seeker to come under the Swami's influence (in 1911) was F.H. Humphreys (no. 92). When he asked how he could help the world, Sri Ramana replied, "Help yourself, and you will help the world. You are not different from the world, nor is the world different from you."

The number of devotees increased greatly over a period of time. The text provides a record of experiences of a large number of such of those devotees who felt inclined to write or communicate through others.

Consideration for the Down-trodden and Lowly

The text contains many instances of Sri Ramana's concern for the underprivileged. One such incident was narrated by Sri Ramana himself many years after the event to Suri Nagamma: When we were on the hill, at midday some women of the lowest caste, who carried heavy loads of grass on their heads, would frantically search for water to quench thirst and relieve exhaustion. But as they were not permitted to go near the well, I would wait near the well and pour water in the cup of their hands, which they drank with great satisfaction. They had to reach home quickly to look after their children, and used to come to us with hope and expectation. (Pp. 93-4.)

For more incidents of the Maharshi's consideration for the depressed, *see* Index – 'M's concern for the underprivileged.'

Skandasram and Sri Ramanasramam

In 1916, as the number of resident devotees increased, Sri Ramana shifted to the more commodious Skandasram, named so as it was built through Herculean efforts of his staunch devotee Kandaswami. [*See* photograph no. 4 (ii) in the book.]

After the death of his mother in 1922 (who had come to stay with her ascetic son six years before and had got *nirvana* in his hands), her body was laid to rest at the foot of the Arunachala hill. The present Ashram, named Sri Ramanasramam, has developed around the mother's *samadhi* called Matrubhuteswara, God in the form of Mother. [*See* photograph nos.14 &16 in the book.]

The Ashram, which began with a single thatched shed over the mother's *samadhi,* has developed into a fairly large complex of buildings,

the most important of which, according to many *sadhakas*, is the Old Hall where Sri Ramana spent most of his living time for over twenty years on a couch gifted by a devotee.[6] [*See* photograph no.7 of Sri Ramana on the couch in the hall.] The shrine over Sri Ramana's *samadhi,* which has a large, bright, and airy meditation hall attached to it, regularly draws a large number of devotees and visitors throughout the year. [*See* photograph no. 15 in the book.]

After Sri Ramana came down to live in the Ashram at the foot of the hill, he made it clear, though not explicitly, that giving *darshan* and communicating with people through silence or brief messages of deliverance was his sole goal in life. A large number of seekers in various stages of spiritual evolution came to him and found peace, clarity and strength of mind in his presence, as detailed in the text.

Some Characteristics and Approach of Sri Ramana

Among the qualities that endeared Sri Ramana to thousands, was his *soulabhya* – easy accessiblility. He sacrificed all privacy of time and sat in the hall day in and day out, and even slept in the presence of all. He did everything possible to make himself available to the devotees. With advancing age, the Ashram management thought of some rest for him after lunch by closing the doors of the hall for two hours. When Sri Ramana learnt about it, he sat outside the hall after lunch saying: "To see me, people come from different parts of the world. They may have some other urgent work. The management is welcome to close the doors but I am free to meet the visitors outside." It took a lot of persuasion to make him relent.[7]

Equally charming was his *sahajata* – the utter normality of behaviour. His manners were so natural that the newcomer immediately felt at ease with him. By a single glance, a nod of the head or by a simple enquiry from him, the visitor felt that Sri Ramana was his very own and that he cared for him. He was extremely humble and unassuming. There was no pontifical solemnity in his expositions; on the contrary, his speech was lively. When a devotee asked why his prayers were not being answered, Sri Ramana laughingly said, "If they were, you might stop praying."

Much could be written about the way Sri Ramana practised *samatva* – equality. In his presence all were alike: high or low, rich or poor, man or woman, child or adult, human or animal. He would never tolerate any consideration or attention being shown to him more than to

any other in the Ashram. Last two paras at p. 74 show how Sri Ramana opposed any physical concession to himself. If some little excess was served to him of any dish or any delicacy above the quantity served to others, he would chide whoever was responsible. *Refer* Index under the head '*Samatva*' for some incidents.

Sri Ramana had compassion for all species of life. His love for plants gets illustrated at pp.179 and 291. The text contains many episodes of his love for animals. Reference to these can be found in Index under the head 'Animals and birds, M's attitude towards'.

Sri Ramana taught the Ashram inmates more by example than precept. This gets illustrated in the last para at p. 204.

Sri Ramana stressed that the path to peace is through service, and he himself set an example in the daily life at the Ashram. He would diligently correct manuscripts and proofs, cut vegetables, clean grain, shell nuts, stitch leaf-plates and assist in cooking, thus exemplifying the dignity of labour and charm of simplicity. *Karma* was, for him, not some special ritualistic action, but the daily tasks that are our common lot. (*Refer* last two paras at page 368.)

Sri Ramana's teachings were mirrored to perfection in his life. He declared that to abide in the Self was the highest attainment, and it was in this State Transcendent that one found him at all times. He had the characteristics of a *jivanmukta* – emancipated, while yet in the physical body. According to the *Yoga Vasistha*, to such a person: "Pleasures do not delight, pains do not distress. He does not work to get anything for himself. There is nothing which he has to achieve. He is full of mercy and magnanimity. He rests unagitated in Supreme Bliss."

Sri Ramana always laid stress on *maunam* – the silence, which is not meant to be negation of activity. It is something very positive. It is Supreme Peace, immutable like a rock that supports all activities, all movements. Answering the puzzlement of her Western friends about the 'inactivity' of Sri Ramana, Ella Maillart writes: Having identified ourselves with our bodies, we are convinced that one has got to be visibly active. We forget that inactivity is the basis of its corollary activity; that the useful wheel could not exist or move without a motionless base. (P. 40.)

Sri Ramana never consciously did anything to make an impact or to carve out a niche for himself in the annals of history. He shunned all publicity and image building. He had successfully effaced himself. Paul Brunton, a British journalist, who lived near Sri Ramana for a few

weeks in 1930, writes: "I like him greatly because he is so simple and modest, when an atmosphere of authentic greatness lies so palpably around him; and also because he is so totally without any traces of pretension and he strongly resists every effort to canonize him during his lifetime." (P. 18.)

Sri Ramana never gave discourses, much less went on lecture-tours. After leaving home, he lived continuously for fifty-four years on or near the Arunachala hill. When people went to him and put questions, he answered them in his own simple way, devoid of solemn discourses.

Sri Ramana was much against miracles. He once said, "A magician deludes others by his tricks, but he himself is never deluded. A *siddha* who manifests his *siddhis* is inferior to the magician as he is deceiving others as much as himself." The 'miracles', which used to happen from time to time looked like coincidences, and if brought to Sri Ramana's attention he would just laugh them away. Sri Ramana would use the term 'Automatic Divine Action' for the 'miracles' and he made the devotee believe that he had no part to play in the matter. For a list of 'miracles', *refer* Index under the head 'Miracles of M – Episodes'.

Sri Ramana did not found a new cult or religion. He did not insist on compliance with any established religious mode, ritual or line of conduct. He emphasized the unity of Being and its accessibility through one's own efforts. According to him, the practical path to realization is *atma-vichara*, the search for the Self, through constant and deep meditation on the question *Who am I?* The approach is neither a religion nor a philosophy. It entails no belief, no scholarship and no psychological doctrine.

In Sri Ramana's view the trouble afflicts us due to the mistake of limiting ourselves to the body. Constant self-questioning helps us to understand and imbibe the true knowledge about our identity, which is our Higher Self (*atman*), residing in the body.

Sri Ramana clarified that *Who am I?* is not a mantra to be repeated. The purpose of asking the question is to withdraw the mind from going outward and diving deep within one's own Self. The monkey-mind which is only a bundle of thoughts, would eventually vanish through persistent and serious meditation on the question *Who am I?*

Sri Ramana maintained that we become unhappy because we have failed to appreciate our true nature, which is happiness and which is inborn in the True Self. The constant urge of all of us to secure happiness in life is an unconscious search for our True Self.

The Last Days

Towards the end of 1948, a small nodule appeared above the left elbow of Sri Ramana. Operations were performed but the malignant tumour appeared again. The disease did not yield to any treatment.The sage was quite unconcerned and remained supremely indifferent to his suffering. Entries at no. 98, pp. 253-6 and no.122, pp. 297-8 by the doctors who attended on Sri Ramana are significant in this regard.

Sri Ramana allowed himself to be operated to satisfy his devotees. Major Chadwick (no. 42) writes: "The night before the last operation I went to see Bhagavan and on my knees begged him not to have it. It was obvious that it could do no good. Each time the tumour had grown bigger and bigger. I prayed that this extra suffering was useless and that he would let us be spared of the strain. But he refused, for, as he said, the doctors had taken so much trouble, it would be shame to disappoint them now. Bhagavan's attitude had all along been to let everybody have a chance; no one should be disappointed."[8]

Sri Ramana had compassion for those who grieved over his 'suffering' and he sought to comfort them by referring to the basic truth, the core of his message, that we are not the body. In his unique way he would ask whether we ever retained the leaf-plate after the meal was over.

The end came on April 14, 1950 at 8.47 p.m. At that very moment a bright comet moved slowly across the sky, reached the summit of hill Arunachala and disappeared high in the sky. The super soul reached its source.

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1. *Refer* annexure-I, p. 410 regarding Arunachala.
2. An abbreviated version of one of the famous stories from this book is at annexure-III, p. 412.
3. Incidentally, after leaving Madurai, *throughout his life* Sri Ramana never put his signature or name anywhere, not even on his will which was executed in 1938.
4. *Iswara* manifested as Arunachala. *Refer* annexure-I, p. 410.
5. Destiny to be worked out in this life, resulting from the balance sheet of actions in past lives.
6. *Refer* p.116, footnote no. 1 for the story of the couch.
7. *Refer* Index - *'Soulabhya'* for episodes of accessibility.
8. *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi* by Sadhu Arunachala (A.W. Chadwick), Sri Ramanasramam, p. 78.

REMINISCENCES

The following provides a first-hand account of the perceptions, experiences and feelings of persons who had an opportunity of living, serving, interacting, or just being in the presence of Sri Ramana Maharshi. In the write-ups below, many speak of the Maharshi in awed tones, which stir and overwhelm the reader. The text also provides glimpses of the Maharshi's divinity and a peep into his philosophy.

1

Dr. Paul Brunton (1898-1981), a British journalist, attracted by Indian mysticism first visited India in 1930. Author of eleven books, he has emphasized the value and importance of the Self within us. He is generally considered as having introduced meditation to the West. He once wrote: "Sri Ramana was a spiritual torch carried to the waiting souls in the West. I was only the unimportant 'link-boy', the humble carrier." The Paul Brunton Philosophic Foundation, New York, has posthumously published his post-1952 writings (the year when his last book *The Spiritual Crisis of Man* was published), in 16 volumes. He was awarded a doctorate in philosophy by the Roosevelt College, USA.

During his first visit, among many saints and yogis, Brunton also met Sri Ramana. He stayed for a few weeks in an improvised shelter very close to Sri Ramana's Ashram.The number of full-time devotees being limited at that time, Brunton had ample opportunity of observing the Maharshi at close quarters and interacting with him. He provides a dispassionate, illuminating and intimate account of the Maharshi's divinity and its

impact in his* A Search in Secret India *published from London in 1934. In his inimitable way he says:

There is something in this man which holds my attention as steel filings are held by a magnet. I cannot turn my gaze away from him. I become aware of a silent, resistless change, which is taking place within my mind. One by one, the questions which I prepared with such meticulous accuracy drop away. I know only that a steady river of quietness seems to be flowing near me; that a great peace is penetrating the inner reaches of my being, and that my thought-tortured brain is beginning to arrive at some rest. I perceive with sudden clarity that intellect creates its own problems and then makes itself miserable trying to solve them. This is indeed a novel concept to enter the mind of one who has hitherto placed such high value upon intellect.

I surrender myself to the steadily deepening sense of restfulness. The passage of time now provokes no irritation, because the chains of mind-made problems are being broken and thrown away. And then, little by little, a question takes the field of consciousness. Does this man, the Maharshi, emanate the perfume of spiritual peace as the flower emanates fragrance from its petals? I begin to wonder whether by some radioactivity of the soul, some unknown telepathic process, the stillness which invades the troubled water of my soul really comes from him.The peace overwhelms me.

The Maharshi turns and looks down into my face; I, in turn, gaze expectantly up at him. I become aware of a mysterious change taking place with great rapidity in my heart and mind. The old motives which have lured me on begin to desert me. The urgent desires which have sent my feet hither and thither vanish with incredible swiftness. The dislikes, misunderstandings, coldness and selfishness which have marked my dealings with many of my fellows collapse into the abyss of nothingness. **An untellable peace falls upon me and I know that there is nothing further that I shall ask from life.**

The Sage seems to carry something of great moment to me, yet I cannot easily determine its precise nature. It is intangible, imponderable, perhaps spiritual. Each time I think of him a peculiar sensation pierces me and causes my heart to throb with vague but lofty expectations.

I look at the Sage. He sits there on Olympian heights and watches the panorama of life as one apart. There is a mysterious property in this man which differentiates him from all others I have met.

He remains mysteriously aloof even when surrounded by his own

devotees, men who have loved him and lived near him for years. Sometimes I catch myself wishing that he would be a little more human, a little more susceptible to what seems so normal to us.

Why is it that under his strange glance I invariably experience a peculiar expectancy, as though some stupendous revelation will soon be made to me? **This man has freed himself from all problems, and no woe can touch him.**

The Sage seems to speak not as a philosopher, not as a pandit trying to explain his own doctrine, but rather out of the depth of his own heart.

I am not religious but I can no more resist the feeling of increasing awe which begins to grip my mind than a bee can resist a flower in all its luscious bloom. The [Maharshi's] hall is becoming pervaded with a subtle, intangible and indefinable power which affects me deeply. I feel, without doubt and without hesitation, that the centre of this mysterious power is no other than the Maharshi himself.

His eyes shine with astonishing brilliance. Strange sensation begins to arise in me. Those lustrous orbs seem to be peering into the inmost recesses of my soul. In a peculiar way, I feel aware of everything he can see in my heart. His mysterious glance penetrates my thoughts, my emotions and my desires; I am helpless before it.

At first, his disconcerting gaze troubles me; I become vaguely uneasy. I feel he has perceived pages that belong to a past, which I have forgotten. He knows it all, I am certain. I am powerless to escape; somehow, I do not want to, either.

I become aware that he is definitely linking my own mind with his, that he is provoking my heart into that state of starry calm, which he seems perpetually to enjoy. **In this extraordinary peace, I find a sense of exaltation and lightness. Time seems to stand still. My heart is released from its burden of care.** Never again, I feel, shall the bitterness of anger and the melancholy of unsatisfied desire afflict me. My mind is submerged in that of the Maharshi and wisdom is now at its perihelion. What is this man's gaze but a thaumaturgic wand, which evokes a hidden world of unexpected splendour before my profane eyes?

I have sometimes asked myself why these disciples have been staying around the Sage for years with few conversations, fewer comforts and no external activities to attract them. Now I begin to understand – not by thought but by lightning like illuminations – that through all those years they have been receiving a deep and silent reward.

Hitherto, everyone in the hall has been hushed to a death-like stillness. At length, someone quietly rises and passes out. He is followed by another, and then another, until all have gone. I am alone with the Maharshi! Never before has this happened. His eyes begin to change; they narrow down to pinpoints. The effect is curiously like the 'stopping down' in the focus of a camera lens. There comes a tremendous increase in the intense gleam which shines between the lids, now almost closed. Suddenly, my body seems to disappear, and we are both out in space! It is a crucial moment. I hesitate – and decide to break the enchanter's spell. Decision brings power and once again I am back in the flesh, back in the hall. No word passes from him to me. I collect my faculties, look at the clock, and rise quietly. The hour of departure has arrived. I bow my head in farewell and depart.

The following relates to Brunton's second visit and stay near Sri Ramana, a few months later:

Whatever I am doing I never fail to become gradually aware of the mysterious atmosphere of the place, of the benign radiation which steadily percolates into my brain. **I enjoy an ineffable tranquility merely by sitting for a while in the neighbourhood of the Maharshi.** By careful observation and frequent analysis, I arrive in time at the complete certitude that reciprocal inter-influence arises whenever our presences neighbour each other. The thing is most suitable. But it is quite unmistakable. **A force greater than my rationalistic mind awes me until it ends by overwhelming me.**

The realisation forces itself through my wonderment that all my questions are moves in an endless game, the play of thoughts which possess no limit to their extent; that somewhere within me there is a well of certitude which can provide me all waters of truth I require; and that it will be better to cease my questioning and attempt to realise the tremendous potencies of my own spiritual nature. So I remain silent and wait.

I am perfectly aware that the sublime realisation which has suddenly fallen upon me is nothing else than a spreading ripple of telepathic radiation from this mysterious and imperturbable man.

The Maharshi once told me, "The greatest error of a man is to think that he is weak by nature, evil by nature. Every man is divine and strong in his real nature. What are weak and evil are his habits, his desires and thoughts, but not himself." His words came as an invigorating tonic. They refresh and inspire me. From another man's lips, from some lesser

and feeble soul, I would refuse to accept them at such worth and would persist in refuting them. But an inward monitor assures me that the Sage speaks out of the depth of a great and authentic spiritual experience and not as some theorizing philosopher on the thin stilts of speculation.

Not a few Western minds will inevitably consider that the life of the Maharshi is a wasted one. But perhaps it may be good for us to have a few men who are apart from our world of unending activity, and survey it for us from afar. It may also be that a jungle Sage, with self lying conquered at his feet, is not inferior to a worldly fool who is blown hither and thither by every circumstance.

Day after day brings fresh indications of the greatness of this man. His silence and reserve are habitual. One can easily count up the number of words he uses in a single day.

I am learning to see that the Maharshi's way of helping others is through unobstrusive, silent and steady outpouring of healing vibrations into troubled souls. Science will one day be required to account for this mysterious telepathic process.

It is clear that his mere presence provides many with spiritual assurance, emotional felicity and, most paradoxical of all, renewed faith in their creed. For the Sage treats all creeds alike, and honours Jesus no less than Krishna.

During daily meditation in the potent neighbourhood of the Sage, I have learnt how to carry my thoughts inwards to an ever-deepening point. Again and again, I become conscious that he is drawing my mind into his own atmosphere during these periods of quiet repose. And it is at such times that one begins to understand why the silences of this man are more significant than his utterances.

There are moments when I feel this power of his so greatly that I know that he has only to issue the most disturbing command and I will readily obey it. But the Maharshi is the last person in the world to place his followers in the chain of servile obedience, and allows everyone the utmost freedom of action. In this respect he is quite refreshingly different from most of the teachers and yogis I have met in India.

The gist of his message is: "Pursue the enquiry, 'Who am I?' relentlessly. Analyse your entire personality. Try to find out where the 'I' thought begins. Go on with your meditations. Keep turning your attention within. One day the wheel of thought will slow down and an intuition will mysteriously arise. Follow that intuition, let your thinking stop and it will eventually lead you to the goal."

I struggle daily with my thoughts and cut away slowly into the inner recesses of the mind. In the helpful proximity of the Maharshi, my meditations and self-soliloquies become increasingly less tiring and more effective. A strong expectancy and a sense of being guided inspire my constantly repeated efforts.There are strange hours when I am clearly conscious of the unseen power of the Sage being powerfully impacted on my mentality, with the result that I penetrate a little deeper still into the shrouded border land of being, which surrounds the human mind.

I study him intently and gradually come to see in him the child of a remote past when the discovery of spiritual truth was reckoned of no less value than is the discovery of a gold mine today. It dawns upon me with increasing force that, in this quiet and obscure corner of South India, **I have been led to one of the last of India's spiritual supermen.**

The serene figure of this living Sage brings the legendary figure of this country's ancient *rishis* nearer to me. One senses that the most wonderful part of this man is withheld. His deepest soul, which one instinctively recognises as being loaded with rich wisdom, eludes one. At times he still remains curiously aloof, and at other times the kindly benediction of his interior grace binds me to him with hoops of steel. I learn to submit to the enigma of his personality, and to accept him as I find him.

I like him greatly because he is so simple and modest, when an atmosphere of authentic greatness lies so palpably around him; because he makes no claim to occult powers and hierophantic knowledge to impress the mystery-loving nature of his countrymen, and also because he is so totally without any traces of pretension and he strongly resists every effort to canonize him during his lifetime.

It seems to me that the presence of men like the Maharshi ensures the continuity down history of a divine message from regions not easily accessible to us all. It seems to me, further, that one must accept the fact that such a sage comes to reveal something to us, not to argue anything with us. At any rate, his teachings make a strong appeal to me.

He brings no supernatural power and demands no blind faith. He avoids the dark and debatable waters of wizardry, in which so many promising voyages have ended in shipwreck. He simply puts forward a way of self-analysis which can be practised irrespective of any ancient or modern theories and beliefs which one may hold, a way that will finally lead man to true self-understanding.

Again and again, I am aware that the Maharshi's mind is imparting something to my own, though no words may be passing between us.

Spiritually my life is nearing its peak.

I enter the hall and straight away assume my regular meditation posture. An intense interiorization of consciousness comes with the closing of eyes. The Maharshi's seated form floats in a vivid manner before my mind's eye. Then the picture disappears leaving me with nothing more than a strongly felt sense of his intimate presence.

Tonight I flash swiftly to a pin-point of concentration. Some new and powerful force comes into dynamic action within my inner world and bears me inwards with resistless speed. In the next stage, I stand apart from the intellect, conscious that it is thinking, and watch thoughts with a weird detachment. The power to think, which has hitherto been a matter for merely ordinary pride, now becomes a thing from which to escape, for I perceive with startling clarity that I have been its unconscious captive.

It is strange enough to be able to stand aside and watch the very action of the brain as though it were someone else's and to see how thoughts take their rise and then die, but it is stranger still to realise intuitively that one is about to penetrate into the mysteries which hide in the innermost recesses of man's soul. I feel like some Columbus about to land on an uncharted continent.

Finally it happens. Thought is extinguished like a snuffed candle. The mind takes its rise in a transcendental source. I remain perfectly calm and fully aware of who I am and what is occurring. Yet my sense of awareness has been drawn out of the narrow confines of the separate personality; it has turned into something sublimely all embracing. Self still exists, but it is a changed, radiant self. With it arrives an amazing new sense of absolute freedom, for thought is like a loom-shuttle which always is going to and fro, and to be freed from its tyrannical motion is to step out of prison into the open air.

I find myself outside the rim of world consciousness. The planet, which has so far harboured me, disappears. I am in the midst of an ocean of blazing light. The latter, I feel rather than think, is the primeval stuff out of which worlds are created, the first state of matter. It stretches away into untellable infinite space, incredibly *alive*.

I, the new I, rest in the lap of holy bliss. I have drunk the Platonic Cup of Lethe, so that yesterday's bitter memories and tomorrow's anxious cares have disappeared completely. I have attained a divine liberty and an almost indescribable felicity. My arms embrace all creation with profound sympathy, for I understand in the deepest possible way that to know all is not merely to pardon all, but to love all. My heart is remoulded in rapture.

With the fall of dusk I take my farewells of everyone except the Maharshi. I feel quietly content because my battle for spiritual certitude has been won, and because I have won it without sacrificing my dearly held rationalism for a blind credulity. Yet when the Maharshi comes to the courtyard with me a little later, my contentment suddenly deserts me.

This man has strangely conquered me and it deeply affects my feelings to leave him. He has grappled me to his own soul with unseen hooks that are harder than steel, although he has sought only to restore a man to himself, to set him free and not to enslave him. He has taken me into the benign presence of my spiritual self and helped me, dull Westerner that I am, to translate a meaningless term into a living and blissful experience. My adventure in self-metamorphosis is now over.

***The following are a few of the many anecdotes recorded in* A Search in Secret India:**

(i) Among the strangely diversified company of human beings who pass through the hermitage, a pariah stumbles into the hall in some great agony of soul or circumstances and pours out his tribulation at the Maharshi's feet. The Sage does not reply, for his silence and reserve are habitual. Instead he gazes quietly at the suffering man, whose cries gradually diminish until he leaves the hall two hours later a more serene and stronger man.

(ii) A cultured Brahmin, college-bred, arrives with questions. One can never be certain whether the Sage will make a verbal response or not, for **often he is eloquent enough without opening his lips.** But today he is in a communicative mood and a few of his terse phrases, packed with profound meanings as they usually are, open many vistas of thought for the visitor.

(iii) A peasant and his family have travelled over some hundred miles to pay a silent homage to the Sage. He is totally illiterate, knows little beyond his daily work, his religious rites and ancestral superstitions. He sits on the floor quietly after having prostrated himself three times. The family stays for a few hours, hardly speaking, and gaze in reverence at the Maharshi. It is clear that **the Maharshi's mere presence provides them with spiritual assurance and emotional felicity.**

(iv) A large group of visitors and devotees are in the hall when someone arrives with the news that a certain man, whose criminal reputation is a byword in the town, is dead. Immediately, there is some discussion

about him, and as is the wont of human nature, various people get engaged in recalling some of his crimes and the more dastardly phases of his character. When the discussion appears to have ended, the Maharshi opens his mouth for the first time and quietly observes, "Yes, but he kept himself very clean, for he bathed two or three times a day!"

Brunton records in his second book **The Secret Path:**

In the Maharshi I discovered the last remnants of that 'Mystic East' about which most of us often hear, but which few of us ever find. I met an unusual man who quickly earned my humble veneration. For although he belonged by tradition to the class of Wise Men of the East, a class which has largely disappeared from the modern world, he avoided all record of his existence and disdained efforts to give him publicity.

The world wants its great men to measure their lives by its puny foot-rule. But no rule has yet been devised which will take their full height, for such men, if they are really worth their name, derive their greatness, not from themselves but from another source. And that source stretches far away into the Infinite. Such sages dwell outwardly apart, keeping alive the divine secrets, which life and fate have conspired to confide in their care.

The Maharshi interested me much despite the fact that his wisdom was not of a kind which is easily apparent and despite the strong reserve which encircled him. He broke his habitual silence only to answer questions upon such recondite topics as the nature of man's soul, the mystery of God, the strange powers which lie unused in the human mind, and so on, but when he did venture to speak I used to sit enthralled as I listened to his soft voice and inspiration gleamed in those luminous eyes. **Each phrase that fell from his lips seemed to contain some precious fragment of essential truth.**

In the presence of the Maharshi one felt security and inward peace. The spiritual radiations that emanated from him were all-penetrating. I learnt to recognise in his person the sublime truths which he taught, while I was no less hushed into reverence by his incredibly sainted atmosphere. **He possessed a deific personality which defies description.** I might have taken shorthand notes of the discourse of the Sage, I might even print the record of his speech; but the most important part of his utterances, the subtle and silent flavour of spirituality which emanated from him, can never be reported.

One could not forget that wonderful pregnant smile of his, with its hint of wisdom and peace won from suffering and experience. **He was**

the most understanding man I have ever known; you could be sure always of some word from him that would smooth your way a little, and that word always *verified* what your deepest feeling told you already.

The words of the Maharshi flame out in my memory like beacon lights. "I pluck golden fruits from rare meetings with wise men", wrote trans-Atlantic Emerson in his diary, and it is certain that I plucked whole basketfuls during my talks with this man. Our best philosophers of Europe could not hold a candle to him.

Brunton writes in his fourth book **A Message from Arunachala:**

I found my own good fortune and needed no other, for **I discovered one of the last of India's spiritual supermen,** the Illuminated Sage of Tiruvannamalai. I 'sat at his feet', as the ancient Indian phrase of pupilship poetically terms it, and thereby learned, through a dynamic experience, of what divine and deathless stuff man is really made. What higher fortune than that can we, pitiful mortals, require?

He sat as immobile as a rock in the ocean, cross-legged in meditation. We foolishly imagine that such a man has failed to put up with the bustling procession of life; it never occurs to us that he may have far out-stepped it.

The Maharshi said, "Suffering turns men towards their creator." Such simple words – yet what a whole philosophy is congealed within the phrase. You may think them to be platitudinous, and they would be, did they not derive from a man who knew what he was talking about because **he ascended to spiritual regions beyond our ken, to regions where God *is*.**

The following is from **The Note Books of Paul Brunton (vol.10):**

Ramana Maharshi was one of those few men who make their appearance on this earth from time to time and who are unique, themselves alone – not copies of anyone else. Face to face with the Maharshi, sometimes one felt in the presence of a visitor from another planet, at other times with a being of another species.

Gazing upon this man, whose viewless eyes are gazing upon infinity, I thought of Aristotle's daring advice, "Let us live as if we were immortal." Here was one who might not have heard of Aristotle, but who was following this counsel to the last letter.

The following is from **The Silent Power:** [1]

(i) A Pure Channel for a Higher Power: Forty years have passed since I walked into his abode and saw the Maharshi half-reclining, half-sitting on a couch. After such a long period most memories of the past become somewhat faded, if they do not lose their existence altogether. But I can truthfully declare that in this case nothing of the kind has happened. On the contrary, his face, expression, figure and surroundings are as vivid now as they were then.What is even more important to me is that – at least during my daily periods of meditation – the feeling of his radiant presence is as actual and as immediate today as it was on that first day.

So powerful an impression could not have been made, nor continued through the numerous vicissitudes of an incarnation which has taken me around the world, if the Maharshi has been an ordinary yogi. I have met dozens of yogis, in their Eastern and Western varieties, and many exceptional persons. Whatever status is assigned to the Maharshi by his followers, my own position is independent and unbiased. It is based upon our private talks in those early days when such things were still possible, before fame brought crowds; upon observations of, and conversation with those who were around him; upon his historical record; and finally upon my own personal experiences. **Upon all the evidence one fact is incontrovertibly clear that he was a pure channel for a Higher Power.**

No physical phenomenon of an occult kind was ever witnessed then; nothing at all happened outwardly. But those who were not steeped too far in materialism to recognise what was happening within him and within themselves at the time, or those who were not congealed too stiffly in suspicion or criticism to be passive and sensitive intuitively, felt a distinct change in the mental atmosphere. It was uplifting and inspiring: for the time being it pushed them out of their little selves, even if only partially.

(ii) A Spiritual Torch: Since the day when I first found him, absorbed in the mysterious trance of *samadhi*, I have travelled in many lands but always my thoughts turned towards Tiruvannamalai as the Muhammedan turns his face during prayer towards Mecca. I knew that somewhere in the wilderness of this world there was a sacred place for me.

At the Sage's feet, I picked up a spiritual torch and carried it to waiting souls in the lands of the West. They welcomed the light with eagerness. There should be no virtue to be accredited to me for that, for whatsoever benefit has accrued to Western seekers comes from the torch which was lit by the Maharshi himself. I was only the unimportant 'link boy' the humble carrier. [*See* Paul Brunton in photograph no.13 in the book.]

1. An anthology published by Sri Ramanasramam.

2

Sadhu Ekarasa (Dr. G.H. Mees, M.A., LL.D.) was a Dutch scholar who came to the Maharshi in 1936. For him it was a case of deep devotion from the very first meeting.

When Kon-Fu-Tse met Wen-Poh-Hsuche-Tse, he did not speak a word. Then his companion, Tse-Lu, said, "Master, for a long time you have wished to see Wen-Poh-Hsuche-Tse. Why is it that you don't speak, now that you see him?" Kon-Fu-Tse answered, "One only needs to look at someone like him. There is no need for speaking. One must see a sage in order to experience him."

In the presence of the Maharshi, the same thing happened to me when I saw him for the first time, and during the many years that I visited him again and again, especially during the three years that I stayed near him almost without interruption. It is for this same reason I find it ever difficult to speak or write about the Maharshi, as I am often asked to do. For a sage who always lives in the realisation, St Dionysius's words hold good: "All that you may say about God is untrue, for God is beyond speech and therefore what you say about God relates to something else." Therefore, if in India someone asks me to speak or to write about the Maharshi, I am inclined to answer that the questioner ought to visit the Maharshi and see for himself.

Westerners have often asked me, "What exactly does the Maharshi do?" One should in fact answer, "The daily occupation of the Sage is to be himself." Because he really succeeds in doing so, the Maharshi makes such a great impression on many of his visitors.The Maharshi effects drastic changes in the lives of many like me. That's what he does, and he does so by doing nothing at all. Often 'the great of this earth' feel like small schoolboys while standing before him. The late Maharaja of Mysore kneeled humbly before him and stood motionless for a long time with tears in his eyes. He kneeled once more and departed without a word.

If a man were to do the greatest deed in the world and come and sit in the presence of Ramana Maharshi he would realise that his deed was nothing compared to the perpetual deed of Self-realisation of the Sage.

If a man were to write the greatest book in the world and come and lay it as an offering before the Sage he would realise that the Sage was a greater Book, which is written from day to day, not with the medium of pen, ink and paper, without intermediation, and even without any conscious effort, in the inner being of all who care to come and read it.

In the case of other personalities it is always possible to make a distinction between theory and practice, or between spirituality and intellect on the one hand and action on the other hand. With the Maharshi no such distinction exists.

The Maharshi is above the spirit of time. His immortality stands out from his every word and look. It lives in the inner heart of all who have had the great privilege to come and sit in his presence. It is reflected only poorly in the books and articles that have been written about him. How could it be otherwise? No one can truly describe God or Truth. Even so, no one can truly describe a Son of God and an embodiment of Truth.

After having studied the lives and ways of teachings of saints and sages of the world, it strikes one that Sri Ramana falls into a class of his own. No one has achieved God-Realisation merely by hearing a name of God. Sri Ramana received 'initiation' by merely hearing the name of Arunachala, pronounced only for the purpose of conveying information about a journey.

Sri Ramana claimed his spiritual heritage without even having been told there was a heritage to claim. He is a Guru in the true sense of the word – the word means 'dispeller of darkness'. The Maharshi's way is as direct as it is simple. But it is so profound that it fails to reach the consciousness of many. Many come to him for something definite, or, in other words, finite. They do not understand that they stand in between the true Initiation into the Mystery of Being and themselves.

Many times it has happened that visitors and resident disciples have asked the Maharshi to vouchsafe them initiation, grace, blessings or spiritual experience, and that he replied, "I am always giving it. If you cannot comprehend it, what am I to do?"

In contradiction to gurus of a less exalted level, who are inclined to be aware of their spiritual superiority, Ramana Maharshi considers all beings to be potential *jnanis* with God-Reality shining within them, even if they are not aware of it. Some of his utterances run parallel to that of the eighth century mystic Hui Neng who said: "The only difference between a Buddha and the average man is that one realises what the other discards."

Sri Ramana proclaims that the Divine Heritage is ever there, waiting to be received; God-Reality is ever present within the Heart of all.

The average man is inclined to pity the Sage, whom he regards as having foregone the pleasure of life.The Sage, however, pities his sympathizing fellow human beings, because the latter do not know what real happiness is.

From the point of view of the restless worldly mind, which delights in movement and change, an unbroken stay of fifty years in one place seems to be a tremendous achievement. It is indeed unique. But surely Sri Ramana has never looked upon it as being in any way remarkable. He has attained the Great Magnet of the world, the centre of the Heart, and became as immovable as his Father, Lord Arunachala.

Extracts from his poem:

Heart's Homage to Sri Ramana

To that incomparable Maharshi, the father and mother of all,
In whom Siva and the Goddess are ever united in Bliss,
To that Sage, whose presence delights the heart,
And whose *leela* is the wonder of all –
To him be offered mind, heart, body, – all creation!

* * *

If future generations will ask what was
The special note of Ramana the Sage,
I shall reply: If any, it is *certainty;*
The certain safety of a Rock, unmoved,
Unchallenged in a storm-swept sea,
The immovable solidity of a mountain
In an ever-wavering world of doctrines and philosophies,
Yea, truly art thou the Sage of 'Arunachala'!

* * *

3

Prof. Banning Richardson, M.A. (Hons.) (Cantab.), A.B. (Princeton), came to teach English literature at St. Stephens College, Delhi, in the 1930s. He felt 'ravished' by the description of the Maharshi in *A Search in Secret India* (no. 1).

In the presence of Sri Ramana Maharshi I felt an inward joy, which suffused my consciousness, and made thinking seem superfluous. **I had come into touch with spiritualism of the finest type.** When I was in the presence of the Master I was so filled with joy and peace that the desire to ask questions disappeared.This happened throughout the brief three days [In May 1937] I stayed at Sri Ramanasramam.

When one comes into the presence of a man who is 'good' not merely because he shuns 'evil' but because his love is universal and falls alike on the just and unjust, then one experiences immediate recognition of a soul that is not great as the world values greatness, but great when compared to an absolute standard of values – a precious stone, an emerald without flaw. It is a difference not merely of quality, but of kind. **What Jesus the Christ taught 2000 years ago that "I am in my Father and my Father is in me. My Father and I are one" is the same as He who teaches today at Tiruvannamalai.**

4

Justice K. Sundaram Chettiar, B.A., B.L., of Madras High Court wrote a foreword to the first well-known biography of Sri Ramana by B.V. Narasimha Swami entitled *Self Realization* (1931).

The years 1909 and '10 and the earlier part of 1911, when I was the District Munsif of Tiruvannamalai, I deem it to be auspicious in my life for the only reason that I had the privilege of sitting at the feet of Sri Bhagavan.The more I came in contact with him, the greater was my devotion to him. Sri Bhagavan is a mine of Wisdom. Questions on abstruse subjects have been answered with clarity and directness, which would not be possible except for a realized soul or *jivanmukta.* He sees everything in himself and himself in everything. **Whatever seems to happen in the**

world is incapable of affecting his peace, which passeth understanding. He has gone beyond the pair of opposites and looks at events in the light of the Absolute. At no time the Sage has done anything on his own initiative as if he has a particular desire for something, nor he has directed others to do anything in fulfilment of any purpose. He has all the characteristics of a *sthitaprajna* described in the *Gita.*

His very presence generates an atmosphere of peace which is felt by devotees visiting him with sincerity and faith. Some of those who approached him with a few questions in their mind found that the answers were given anticipating their questions. Some find their doubts cleared while sitting silently within his aura, without any speech by him.

5

Manu Subedar was a member of the Central Legislative Assembly in pre-Independence era.

I was alone in the car from Katpadi to Tiruvannamalai and wanted to go over my questions and revise them, if necessary. As I formulated each question, I found I knew the answer! So when I went and had the *darshan* of the Maharshi, I had really no question to ask.

I presented to the Maharshi the *Avadhoota Gita* and the *Ashtavakra Gita* published by the Sastu Sahitya Mudranalaya Trust, Ahemadabad, of which I am the chairman, and drew his attention to the first verse of the *Avadhoota Gita,* which says: "It is only through the Grace of God that in men with knowledge is born a desire to experience cosmic unity, a desire which protects them from the great dangers of *samsara.*"

With infinite compassion in his eyes the Maharshi looked at me and instructed one of the followers to bring a book. This was the *Maha Bhakta Vijayam* of Nabhaji. Bhagavan opened the book and began to read. (I noted with awe that the book opened exactly at the page where he intended to read.) The Maharshi seemed to relish reading the discourse.

There are teachers who mystify in order to impress the pupil. The Maharshi, on the contrary, has the direct method. He discloses the truth and the whole truth in the simplest form in which he has not only formulated it as a thought, but lived it as an experience.

The look, which the Maharshi gives you, is a question. At least I

felt it so. The question is: "I see a unity, but you keep grasping at the variety. Why don't you know yourself properly and realise your true self? You can then march on to the realisation of the unity of self with the Self." Nothing is so helpful as the august presence of the Maharshi for those who seriously intend to progress on the spiritual path.

There is spiritual communication and kindliness in his looks, eliciting what is best in a person. His presence during the silent hour acts as a catalyst, enabling us to secure our spiritual yearning. There is grace and benignity in the way he looks at the devotees as a mother looks at her children.

6

William S. Spaulding (Jr.) of New York City visited Sri Ramana in the 1930s.

As I sat in His Presence for the first time, the most powerful impression was that of what I can only call an almost palpable 'golden radiance', the visual effect of a tremendous spiritual force. There was an intense and subtle radiation that seems to flow from Him continually – and once having sensed this, words, questions, techniques of meditation, etc., seemed to dissolve immediately. **The Maharshi also possessed to a high degree of that quality which is described as 'divine indifference', attributed to certain saints of the Christian Church.** This must not be taken to mean what is generally associated with the term 'indifference', but rather as a beneficent, unfettered out-pouring of healing radiations of a Realised Being.

7

Grant Duff (Douglas Ainslie), a scholar and a senior government official in Madras Presidency in the 1930s, was nephew of Sir Mountstaurt Grant Duff, Governor of Madras in the 1880s.

I do not know what happened when I saw the Maharshi for the first time, but **the moment he looked at me, I felt he was the Truth and the Light.** There could be no doubt about it, and all the doubts and speculations I had accumulated during the past many years disappeared in

the Radiance of the Holy One. Though my visits to the Ashram were brief, I felt that every moment I was there I was building up within me what could never be destroyed.

There it did not take me long to see that I was in direct contact with one who has passed beyond the boundaries of the senses and was indeed already merged in the Absolute of his true Self, though manifesting here for our benefit for a few brief years. [When asked how he got such an impression, he frankly confessed] I cannot reply; as I should to one who asked me how I saw the sun on looking out of the window, by saying that I did so by the use of my eyes and incidentally of all other senses collaborating. I do not need any algebraic or other proof of the existence of the sun. I do not need any other proof of the divinity of Ramana Maharshi.

Should those who have it in their power to visit the Ashram delay, they will have only themselves to blame in future lives. **Never perhaps in world history was the Supreme Truth – Reality, *Sat* – placed within such easy reach of so vast a multitude.** Here and now through no special merit of our own, we may approach Reality. The sole difficulty is that of paying for the journey[1] but the reward is Knowledge of the Self.

The Maharshi has extraordinary insight into other beings. He sees and knows everything about all those who come before him. **The Maharshi has particularly appealed to me because of his extreme politeness and gentleness. He is gentle to a degree that surpasses gentleness.** My visit to the Sage of Arunachala has been the greatest event in my life.

Extracts from his poem:

With Sri Ramana of Arunachala

I've wandered far: Yes I have been
From land to land to land:
Sages I've seen, great kings and queens
The lovely, wise and grand.
But only there – at the Asramam
By Arunachalam –
Have I known that joy without alloy,
I am! I am! I am!

* * *

1. This was written from London in 1935. *Refer* 'Introduction' to *Sri Ramana Gita* published by Sri Ramanasramam.

8

Dilip Kumar Roy of Sri Aurobindo Ashram was a well-known personality of his time and has authored many books. He was a *bhakta* and a musician. Sri Ramana's famous quote, "*Bhakti* is *jnanamata*"(the mother of *jnana*) was in reply to his query whether Sri Ramana advocated *jnana* and disparaged *bhakti.*

I first heard of Ramana Maharshi when I was a member of the Ashram of Sri Aurobindo. I asked Sri Aurobindo about the Maharshi and he wrote back that he was a yogi of remarkable strength and attainments and that his *tapasya* had won 'glory for India.' On another occasion he characterised him as a **'Hercules among the yogis.'** So I longed to pay a visit to Sri Ramanasramam.

When I arrived at the Ashram, I felt a deep malaise. How could I hope to get peace and inspiration from the Maharshi if I had failed to get it at the feet of my own Guru, who was surely no less great? Yet I felt sincerely that I had done well in coming to seek inspiration from the great yogi who was venerated by spiritual aspirants of every category.

I entered the hall of the great sage, where he has been living a singular life, blessing all, but belonging to none, interested in everything but attached to nothing. He gave the impression of Siva, the great God of compassion, living a blissful, free and open life, with no walls of ego to cabin the summit vision. What I saw impressed me deeply, though I find it far from easy to portray what I saw or rather experienced. Here was a man who lived like a god, supremely indifferent to all that we worldlings clamour for without cease. Dressed in a bare *koupin* (loincloth) he yet sat ensconced in grandeur of plenary peace and egoless bliss which we could but speculate upon, yet never fathom.

I touched his feet and then, without a word, sat down near him on the floor and meditated, my heart heaving with a strange exaltation which deepened by and by into an ineffable peace and bliss which lasted for hours and hours. Words seem utterly pale and banal the moment you want to describe an authentic spiritual experience, which is vivid, throbbing and intense.

Later, as I reclined, bathed in peace, in an easy chair under the stars at which I gazed in an ecstasy of tears, I felt deeply grateful towards the Maharshi. I recalled a pregnant saying of his: "Just be. All is in you, only a veil stands in between. You have only to rend the veil and then, well just be." I had found this favourite remark of his rather cryptic till now. But at this moment I understood for the first time and wrote a poem in homage to the Maharshi.

The Maharshi's self-obliviousness was enchanting for me. **Greatness sat easily on him as beauty on a sunset cloud, but with a devastating effect.** All our ideas as to how the great should act seem to be dismissed by him with a smile of simple disavowal. I saw with my own eyes day after day during my five-day stay at the Ashram of this unique sage, the like of whom I am sure is not to be met within this vast world.

I have never in my life of varied experience and wide travelling met a man so utterly indescribable and yet so profoundly moving. I cannot say why he moved me to my depths with eyes where no soft light of emotion presided, and yet it bathed me when I met his gaze with **a peace that I find as unaccountable as it was delectable.**

The Maharshi has not the slightest use for pretentiousness and self-importance. He is for no trappings either of speech or learning.

I saw indeed a man, who in his exterior was anything but distinguished, far less handsome or captivating, and yet – how shall I put it – he was so compelling and so disarming! I shall never forget how deeply stirred I was when I saw his austere yet kind face in the light of electric lamps. The peace I felt reminded me of the startled, though unvoiced query, of Paul Brunton [No. 1]: "Does this man, the Maharshi, emanate the perfume of spiritual peace as the flower emanates fragrance from its petals?"

I sang songs more than once in his presence. And everytime I was ravished by his kind glance and bewitching smile. **I realised for the first time what is really meant by the word 'sacred'.**

Extracts from his poem:

To Sri Ramana Maharshi

O Son of Dawn! Who only knowest the Sun,
And through His eyes of Light see'st all that lies
Revealed – a flawless Plentitude which none
But Sun's own children ever might surmise!

For only the chosen few so far have won
The Truth that shines beyond world's wounds and cries;
Who see Thee, throned in the high dominion
Of Self's invulnerable Verities,
Enjoy a glimpse of Bliss of the Beyond.
Thou singest: 'Nay, 'tis here' – yet without Thy
Compassion's pledge – how few would understand?
Homage to Thee, O minstrel of Clarity!

* * *

9

B. Sanjiva Rao, B.A. (Cantab.), belonged to the pre-Independence Indian Educational Service.

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi is a strange figure – one of the strangest and yet one of the most fascinating and striking personalities of all times. **As a matter of fact he belongs not to any age, but to all ages, not to time but to eternity.**

The Maharshi has renounced as valueless all that the modern world values most. He has no use for money; he is no respecter of rank and position. His detachment is as complete as it is perfect. Nothing seems to possess the power to disturb his superpoise, his marvellous tranquility and peace. Tragedy does not move him in a personal way. Pilgrims who come to witness the yearly festival of lighting of the Beacon on the top of the Hill [*Refer* annexure - II, p.355.] and worship it as the symbol of Siva, instinctively recognise the presence of that same power in the Sage and give to him the same worship. There is little doubt that an ageless Wisdom, as old as the Heart of the Hill shines through those wonderful eyes which look with such perfect tranquility and yet such deep compassion upon the suffering world.

The Maharshi is a living proof of the ancient *advaitic* thought. He demonstrates the reality of Self-transcendence. He states that the Ego-less state is the natural, the real state, that the Ego-state is the unnatural and the false state. In the Ego-less condition, the true 'I' stands apart from the apparent reaction of the mind. The Sage watches the movements of the mind with the same objective detachment and

impartiality as the scientific investigator of a physical phenomenon. The immediate effect of such self-scrutiny is quietening and stilling of the mind.

The Maharshi represents a very perfect instance of the Ego-less state. He speaks little and only when he finds it necessary to do so. Silence is to him the most powerful expression of Being, which speech only hinders. He uses the Power of this Silence in a most effective fashion. When any visitor presents him with a problem for solution, he vouchsafes no answer but retires in the depths of his own being. He becomes the embodiment of the very essence of Silence, and in that tranquil quietness, the visitor finds his mind becoming still under an overpowering radiation from the sage. In that stillness, the problem dissolves and the visitor leaves the august presence marvelling what mysterious power has come to his aid.

The Ego is the atom of the psychic world. If the disintegration of the atom has given us so much power, what may not be accomplished by the annihilation of this ego-self? The Sage of Tiruvannamalai can answer this question. He himself is the living answer.

10

Justice N. Chandrasekhara Aiyar was High Court Judge at Madras.

I paid my homage to the sage only twice, and was struck by his large luminous eyes, through which the very soul peeps into us, as it were.[1]

When he fixes his keen gaze on us, it looks as though he is seeing the inner clockwork of a mechanism in a transparent case; and you get the feeling that a mild current of grace is flowing into you from him.

He is a veritable storehouse of spiritual energy and wisdom. He radiates *shanti* or Peace, and those who come into contact with him feel a subtle, pervasive and godly influence greatly spreading over them. **Such men belong to a superlative category of their own.** He speaks very little, but when he does speak his words roll out slowly, with deliberate and telling effect. **His silence is however more eloquent than his speech.** The tremor of his head is suggestive of the famous Upanishadic teaching – not this, not this.

Perfect detachment, indifference to pain and pleasure, absolute renunciation, true mental equipoise are hallmarks of the Indian *rishis.* Sri Ramana belongs to this great hierarchy of Seers.

To be in his presence is by itself a stirring experience in the elevation of the soul; to receive a few words of counsel from him is a rare blessing; to be the recipient of his benediction is to be assured of a special fortune.

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1. *Refer* Paul Brunton (no. 1): 'In so far as the human eyes can mirror divine power, it is a fact that the Sage's do that.' *A Search in Secret India.*

11

Eleanor Pauline Noye of California visited the Ashram twice in 1940 and stayed for about ten months.

My heart throbbed with expectation as I was taken to the hall. As I entered, I felt the atmosphere filled with Sri Bhagavan's Purity and Blessedness. One feels a breath of the Divine in the Sage's presence. **When He smiled it was as though the gates of Heaven were thrown open. I have never seen eyes more alight with Divine Illumination – they shine like stars.** His look of Love and Compassion was a benediction that went straight to my heart. I was immediately drawn to Him. One feels such an uplifting influence in His saintly presence and cannot help but sense His extraordinary spirituality.

It is not necessary for Him to talk, His silent influence of love and light is more potent than words could ever be. I do not think there is another like Him on earth today. To see Him is to love Him. As I looked upon Sri Bhagavan's serene face and into His eyes which beamed with mercy, my soul was stirred. He knew how much I needed Him, while He looked straight into my heart. Everyone who comes to Him is blessed; the inner peace which is His is radiated to all.

I had not slept well for years, although I had been taking medicine. I said nothing to Sri Bhagavan about this. The amazing thing was that I slept soundly the first night and thereafter without taking any medicine. I received 'the Medicine of all medicines', the unfailing grace of the Lord. I arose next morning, feeling refreshed, as though I were born anew. Soon after, as I was standing by the gate one afternoon, Sri Bhagavan stopped while on His way to the hill and asked me, "If I had more peace." His loving solicitude made me feel quite at home; and when He smiled my joy knew no bounds.

When I left America, I longed for peace. **Here at the feet of the Lord of Love, peace and happiness garlanded me and enriched my being.** I know that Bhagavan led me to this heaven of rest. Mere words can never express the peace and joy felt in His Presence; it must be experienced. There one truly has a glimpse of the Eternal. **The most Blessed experience of my life was my stay at the feet of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi.**

The Ashram is so primitive, but therein lies its charm. It is truly the Holy-land. The air is permeated with His peace and love. On full moon night it is especially inspiring to go round the hill. In this deep silence and quietude one readily hears the voice of God.

I reluctantly made plans to leave the place. I had grown to love it and was very sad during those last days. Sri Bhagavan said, "I will always be with you, wherever you go."

When the last day arrived, I could not stop crying. In the afternoon when I sat before Sri Bhagavan He smiled and said, "She has been crying all day; she does not want to leave me!" Later I went to Him for His blessings. The pain of parting was almost more than I could bear; with tears in my eyes I knelt with deepest reverence and devotion before my beloved Master. May He always be my Father, Mother and God; and may I always be His child, and whatever I do, may it be in His name.

***She wrote the following after the Maharshi's* mahanirvana:**

What tribute can a candle pay to the sun? What we best conceive, we fail to speak. Words cannot express the infinite love and tenderness we experienced during those days beside him. He seemed to clasp us to his bosom as a mother clasps her child. As we beheld his utter submission, one could not help but think of Lord Jesus before the crucifixion. Sri Bhagavan treated his body as something apart from him. As the body grew weaker his face became more radiant, his eyes shone like two stars. He was ever abiding in the Self. A few days before he passed away, he remarked, "They say I am dying, but I shall be more alive than before." Now he is all pervading.

Internationally renowned psychologist Dr. C.G. Jung of Zurich has said, "What we find in the life and teachings of Sri Ramana is the purest of India with its breadth of world liberated and liberating humanity, it is a chant of the millenniums."

12

K.S.Venkataramani, M.A., B.L., was Adviser to the former Alwar State (Rajasthan).

Truth or Reality is indescribable, and words obscure more and reveal less. Words take us nowhere in Self-realisation. Therefore, nothing like an immersion in Sri Bhagavan's immediate presence.

His presence kindles your *swanubhava* and sets you on the immortal path of Self-enquiry. His silence ambushes your hundred doubts of the mind in his presence.

Sri Bhagavan is an ocean of tranquility. There is Peace in his presence that passeth all comprehension. He greets you and clasps you not by the monkey-hand of the mind, but by the invisible divine feelers of his heart. He touches you by a fourth-dimensional touch: the touch of the Master that detaches the mind from the fetters of its own dear ego-world.

How infinite is the Grace of Sri Bhagavan, but how little we profit by it! He rolls on sublimely like a deep river in flood, unmindful of the wastefulness and the ignorance of the human dwellers on the banks. There is an elemental sublimity about Sri Bhagavan like that of the winds and the waves, the sun and the stars.

Sri Bhagavan's sovereign *sadhana* for Self-realisation is 'Self-enquiry'. It requires no *asana* or yogic ritual, but a strenuous turning of the mind inward. It is the shortest though the most rugged short cut to attain the sublimation of the mind. It is a process that makes the mind first fatigued, annoyed and churlish. It may set free at first only dense smoke and no spark, like green fuel on fire. But if you persist long enough, you will be surely rewarded with the flame of illumination, smokeless and glowing.

13

Dr. C. Kunhan Raja was Director of Adyar Library, Theosophical Society, Madras.

While I was in the Hall during the one day I was in the Ashram, I took my seat along with others. I sat for hours together both in the forenoon and in the afternoon. Except for the first few words of greetings and my

reply thereto, I did not talk at all. Though there was no actual talk between us, there was an unbroken communion.

What produced on me a great impression is the repose, the unruffled calmness that prevailed in the place as a result of the presence of the Maharshi. He seldom spoke. There was always a look of serene joy in his face; sometimes it glowed up into a lustre of bliss; at times I noticed that he rose into a state of *samadhi* or trance. But that look of blissful peace was always there. I cannot say he was unaware of his surroundings; indeed, he was always in the fullness of unbroken awareness, but the surroundings made no fluctuations in him. When people prostrated themselves before him or when they offered presents, there was the same look on his face. The mode of salutation and the mode of approach made no difference to him. To him, it was one, continuous state of serene peace and joy – *ananda*.

While he appears quite unconcerned with things around him, he was not only attentive but also alert in correcting pronunciation in the recitation of Tamil verses.

The very fact that the Maharshi makes enquiries about the visitors, looks into his correspondence, pays attention to the cleanliness and tidiness of his environment, keeps certain programmes in his daily routine and sticks to them with punctuality, shows that to him this physical world is an integral part of the Reality.

The Maharshi is a linguist, knowing, besides his Tamil in which he is a great author and poet, English, Sanskrit, Telugu and Malayalam. He spoke the three South Indian languages with perfect ease.

It was a great privilege for me to visit the Ashram. Till now I had only read about the Maharshis in the *puranas*. The presence of a Maharshi in this world at a time when there is utter anarchy in science, must be an eye-opener for the scientists, in that they will think of expanding the scope of science so as to include the truth of the scientist himself, instead of confining science to what the scientist is aware of as external, objective reality.[1]

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1. *Refer* Paul Brunton: "The most astounding discoveries will come when our scientists turn away for a while from metal and stone and electricity to examine and explore the nature of self within the laboratory of man. Scientists already know that the real seeing agent in sight is not the eye but the mind that uses that organ. They have yet to discover what it is that works the mind. And when they do that they will come into contact with the real Self of man, the being out of whom both mind and body derive their existence and maintain their lives." *A Message from Arunachala* (1936).

14

Madan Mohan Varma, Registrar, University of Rajputana was later Chairman, Rajasthan Public Service Commission, Jaipur.

For fifty years the *Purusha* [God] has chosen for the benefit of humanity, to keep the mortal frame known as Ramana, radiating through it to all who can see, hear and 'feel' the LIFE sustaining the frame. Humanity reaches its high watermark in such a life, so **indeed such a life is a blessing to humanity.**

Shaken by a personal bereavement, the reaction of which at once laid bare the hollowness of the writer's previous religious studies and pretensions spanning over 25 years, and epitomised his deluded intellect, the writer dragged himself over a distance of 2,000 miles to Tiruvannamalai.Five days at the Sage's Ashram, but no miracle.The writer came back somewhat soothed but also somewhat disappointed. He had hurled scores of 'questions' on religious matters at the Maharshi. But he was indifferent. Only when the writer sought the permission to leave – with sorrow still darkening his heart – he smiled a gracious blessing which is still fresh in the writer's memory, a blessing which seemed to arise from the secret recesses of the Heart, and the like of which he had never received before from any mortal.

The writer had occasion to meet many a great man in the past, to listen to their orations, to read their teachings and to follow their instructions. Often he was inspired and uplifted. But like the sea wave it all appeared to recede as time passed. But this time, O Maharshi! What 'Time Bomb' you stole into my being which has since, as if from beneath, been *mining* many a fond castle of ego. Even though the outer life remains the same as ever, a plaything of *gunas,* the ship of life finds its course changed, all unknown. And while all the old bonds are visible in their majesty as before, the gold fetters somehow seem to be losing their 'gold'. **From 'outside' you pushed me 'inside'. You have blessed me with your contact and removed many a cobweb of the deluded intellect, and *pulled* me from the 'circumference' to the 'center'. A tribute? You need no tribute from me. And what tribute can a poor candle pay to the sun?**

15

Ella Maillart, a Swiss travel writer and photographer, met the Maharshi in the 1940s. Two captivating photographs of Sri Ramana shot by her are in the photo-album *Radiance of the Self,* published by the Ramana Maharshi Centre, Bangalore.

I don't think it is within my power to depict the subtle atmosphere which renders the place [the Ashram] unique in its setting of dry and hard beauty.

Westerners who come to know the Maharshi feel constrained to say how puzzled they are by the inactivity of the Sage. We having identified ourselves with our bodies are convinced that one has to be visibly active. We forget that inactivity is the basis of its corollary activity; that the useful wheel could not exist or move without a motionless center.

I felt strongly at Tiruvannamalai that such great ones as the Maharshi are the salt of the earth. Something intangible emanates from these realised men; they sanctify the land through their presence. The Sage has attained a certitude which makes him free from restlessness, free from fear, desire and doubt – he can do things none of us can do, because he is egoless. Those who live near him have the conviction that he knew what he was talking about, who knew the 'why and how' of what had been harassing them. They stopped worrying continually about problems they were never meant to solve.

He is a link between what we call the concrete world and the Unmanifest. **He is a living symbol of that knowledge without which the humanity of today is but a pitiful joke.** He implants a lasting peace in the centre of every man's heart.

What do we see in the West of today? Every moment adding to the despair of men lost in fruitless researches. Hopelessness gaining ground, each one being obliged to seek a solution along alleys most of which become blind.

The Sage of the Vedanta symbolises a link between the unknowable ultimate and man. The Sage relies on actionless activity and carries on wordless teaching.

16

Swami Siddheswarananda, an erudite scholar of Vedanta was Head, Ramakrishna Mission, Paris.

In an article, Prof. M.Lacombe of the University of Paris wrote about the Maharshi as follows: "His person sheds a force consisting of intelligence and mastery of the Self. A flashing eye, intense and fixed without hardness, Olympian softness of gesture, slender and delicate in an immobile body, he is considered by excellent judges to be a very authentic yogi to have reached the highest Realisation."

Sri Ramana Maharshi expounds a system of thought and philosophy of life which incarnates the essence of Vedantic teachings.The Maharshi discovered Truth; he found it of his own accord, without any exterior help. He had the direct experience of the Self. It is called *aparokshanubhuti.* It is distinct from all knowledge obtained by intellectual effort. He who has this direct experience of the Self is considered to be liberated even while he is still alive. He is called *jivanmukta.***The existence of such individuals, who are living incarnations of the Truth, renders the Truth demonstrable.** The Vedantic realisation of these great beings gives in effect the possibility of a practical application, and their realisations raise the level of human consciousness.

The Maharshi is a *tattva jnani* and the field of his search and experience is much greater than that of a mystic. The Sage transcends the limits of the three *gunas.*

Whoever has occasion to examine at first-hand the Maharshi, knows full well that he is neither an 'extrovert' nor an 'introvert'. He is the most normal human that one can ever find. He is in effect a *sthitaprajna,* the man whose intelligence is solidly founded. I have seen him apparently plunged in himself, but when someone at the end of the hall made a mistake in the recitation of certain Tamil verses, the Maharshi opened his eyes, corrected the mistake, then again closed his eyes and returned to his former state.

When I saw him I found in him the perfect example of the description which Sri Sankaracharya gives in his *Vivekachudamani,* when he explains what characterises a *jivanmukta.* According to verse 429: He who even when his mind is merged in *Brahman*, is nevertheless entirely awake, but is at the same time free from the characteristics of the

waking state and whose realisation is free from all desires, should be considered a man liberated while still alive.

At my request, the Maharshi recited certain lines from the composition of the Saint Manikyavachakar where the author spoke of the condition of the soul melted in love; hardly had the Maharshi pronounced a few lines when there was a brilliance in his face. He who rarely expresses his inner emotion in any outward form, could not restrain a few silent tears. A slanting ray of the morning sun from the hillside made the scene still more vivid. A peace that passeth all understanding pervaded the whole atmosphere. For more than an hour there was perfect silence. It looked as if one of the fresco paintings of Ajanta had come to life.

The Maharshi can be best described in the words of the *Gita*: One who is satisfied in the Self by the Self (II. 55); the self-controlled one (XII. 14); one with firm determination (XII. 14); the desireless one (XII. 16); one who has renounced all enterprise (XII.16); content with anything (XII.19); sitting like one unconcerned (XIV. 23). Further, he is the man who revels here and now in the Self alone, and in the Self alone is content – for him there is no work which he must do (III. 17); he who is inwardly happy, revels within, and who likewise becomes the Light within, that yogi becomes the *Brahman* and realises the transcendental Bliss of the *Brahman* (V. 24).

Based on the commentary of Sankara on the 89th *Karika* of the 4th chapter of *Mandukya Karikas,* **the Maharshi is *Mahadhi,* or the man of the highest intellect, as he has understood that which transcends all human experiences. His omniscience is constant and remains undiminished.**

He is the person with no tendency at all to proselytise. He has no mission to achieve. According to Sankara in the *Nirvanashtaka,* he alone can say, "I have no death nor fear, no distinction of rank or class. I have no father, no mother, no friend, no master, no disciple; I am Absolute Knowledge and Bliss. I am the all-pervading Self, I am the all-pervading Self."

Like the great fire which burns on the Hill Arunachala,[1] **the Maharshi is a veritable lighthouse for those who wish to find in modern India the revivifying effects of the teachings of Upanishads consecrated by time.**

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1. *Refer* annexure-II, p. 411.

17

T.M. Krishnaswami Aiyar, B.A., B.L., was Chief Justice of the former Travancore State (Kerala).

I first saw the slim figure of a yogi who seemed to be the flame of a candle. The candle has now grown into Sri Ramanasramam. The flame is still there as it was. The paradox is that the flame feeds the candle and not the candle the flame.

Bhagavan Ramana is a remarkable personality. He has now become an expanding atmosphere. The Ashram cannot interest those who have not learnt to seek the treasures of man's inner consciousness, or to catch the message of silence. For him who yearns to look without, Bhagavan Ramana will show the world within.

Bhagavan Ramana has frequently told the seekers after truth that if one learns about oneself as every being the 'I' of itself, one knows oneself as well as the world. It must mean the illumination of the spirit and its upheaval.

The message of peace and love, of meditation and realisation, and of service and universalism has a great value in setting humanity on a higher plane. **Sri Ramanasramam is an oasis in the desert of the modern world.** It is the life-spring of love and life.

18

K.S. Ramaswami Sastri, B.A., B.L., was Chief Justice of the former Pudukottah State (Tamil Nadu).

I have gone to the Maharshi often during these forty years and more [written in 1946]. I have seen him when he was in a small cave up the hillside absorbed in mysterious and unbroken silence. I have also seen him when he came down the hillside. I used to ply him with questions about the soul and he used to smile and give brief, bright, blessed replies dispelling doubt. **The world-intoxicated mind became subdued, calm and purified in the holy atmosphere of the Sage.**

When we sat before him, time rolled on while we were oblivious of its course. Each felt a sense of inner release and was happy as a bird sailing through the vast expanse of the blue sky. The inner Fullmoon of

Divine Rapture rose in the sky of the hearts of all. Then came to my mind the great passage in Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* about Christ: "Indeed, that is the charm about Christ; when all is said, He is just like a work of art. He does not really teach one anything, but by being brought into His presence one becomes something." I felt that I was predestined to the Sage's presence and went into the stillness of the night, moving away from him physically but feeling drawn nearer to him in spirit like a steamer borne against the wind.

The Maharshi lived in unbroken communion with the Self and became *sthitaprajna* (the man of steadfast wisdom). **The Maharshi's religion is the most universal of all faiths:** Change your mentality, why change the environment and run into a forest? Attain self-control, self-knowledge and self-reverence. *Atma-siddhi* is the highest *siddhi*. The Maharshi's Gospel of Self-enquiry is the Upanishadic gospel. It sublimates and merges the mind or ego in the Self.

19

Dr. K.C.Varadachari, M.A., Ph.D., was a scholar based inTirupati.

Sri Ramana Maharshi opens up a dawn in the spiritual understanding of the modern day. We enjoy the perfume of his presence, but we cannot obviously know to which infinite stretches of space the perfume is being carried.

In April 1937, **I had the good fortune of beholding him face to face. This *darshan* of the Sage is an experience in itself. It is not capable of being described. So very casual yet pregnant, so very unobstrusive yet deeply significant, pleasant, deeply penetrating and inspiring somewhere in the depth.**

Sri Ramana's consciousness illumined with tremendous power of discrimination proceeds to find out the nature of the Self, that which all of us call the 'I', its origin, so to speak. 'Who am I?' is the fundamental question posed by Sri Ramana. This question is comparable to Kant's[1] famous question: 'How is experience possible?' Instead of walking down the corridor to the 'phenomenal' being like Kant, Sri Ramana ascended up the 'noumenal' being [which in Kantian philosophy is a thing in itself, independent of sensory or intellectual perception.]

Sri Ramana brings back to mankind the Reality of the ancient seers, *rishis*. He reveals the Himalayan possibilities of peace – soul-peace, that annihilates all strife, and of the perennial life that tolerates no distrust or disruption.

The life of Sri Ramana bears witness to the ever-abiding reality of the teachings of the Vedic seers, and continues uninterrupted the spiritual tradition of the *sanatana* philosophy. May Sri Ramana be with us forever and ever more!

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1. A well-known German philosopher.

20

Giridhari Lal was a resident of Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry in the 1940s.

Day by Day with Bhagavan ***by Devaraja Mudaliar (no. 35) has the following entry dated March 18, 1946*****:**

In response to Giridhari Lal's question, "When the *kali yuga*, which consists of so many thousand years, would end?" Bhagavan said: I don't consider time real. So I take no interest in such matters. We know nothing about the past or the *yugas* which were in the past. Nor do we know about the future. But we know the present exists. Let us know about it first. Then doubts will cease. Time and space always change, but there is something which is eternal and changeless. For example, the world and time, past or future, nothing exists for us in sleep. But *we* exist. Let us try to find out that which is changeless and which always exists. How will it benefit us to know that the *kali yuga* started in such and such year and that it would end so many years from now?

Regarding the devotee's query as to why the *puranas* give the exact duration of each *yuga*, Bhagavan replied: The immensity of the periods of time assigned to each *yuga* may be a mere device to draw man's attention to the fact that even if he lived upto hundred years, his life is such a trifling, insignificant fraction of a *yuga*. Therefore, he should take a proper view of his humble place in the entire scheme and not go about with a swollen head, deeming himself as of great importance. Instead of saying, What is man's life compared to eternity? They have taught him to consider how short his span is.

Extracts from his poem:

Sri Maharshi – The Alchemist

What Maharshi knew at seventeen, we don't know at seventy. Why?
Ah! We lack the fire; our hearts are cold and our heads are hard.
Alas! What shall we do?
Go to Maharshi? Yea; He'll lend us fire, warm our hearts – now cold –
And turn the stones in us into Gold.
That is Maharshi, the Alchemist.

* * *

21

Prof. B.L.Atreya, M.A., D.Litt., was Head, Dept. of Philosophy and Psychology, Benaras Hindu University.

I had the privilege of being at the Ashram of Ramana Maharshi for a short time in March 1940. He made a deep impression on my mind, a mind that has been moulded by a study of scientific and philosophic writings of the East as well as of the West. The greatest peculiarity of Ramana Maharshi's life is that although he has moulded and perfected his personality on the lines of Advaita Vedanta, a purely Indian way of Self-realization, he is highly appreciated and resorted to by the Western seekers and by those Indians who have been educated on Western lines.

Ramana Maharshi's greatness is deeply founded. It is based on his actual living by the creed of the Advaita Vedanta, which holds that the reality is one without a second, that everything in this universe is but one Reality, which is Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. True to his creed, he regards nothing alien, none as other, no event as undesirable. For him the ideal is the real and the real is the ideal. He has no other relation with any body but that of love. Love, affection, kindness, mercy etc., which are expressions of one and the same thing, and the feeling of unity with all, ever flow from him. *Jnana* is like *akasha* [the sky]. The supreme Self which is to be known through *sadhana* is like the ether. The various objects we see in the world as well as the souls are also like the ether. Therefore, who is to know which? What is to be known by what? The supreme realization is that there is no plurality. True knowledge is 'distinction-less'.

That knowledge is the Self, the light divine. That knowledge is Bhagavan Ramana.This is the secret of the Maharshi's unique greatness and consequent popularity. **The whole of humanity owes its homage to this great Sage amidst us.**

22

Oliver Lacombe was L'Attache Culturel, Consulat General de France, Calcutta.

The visit I had the honour to pay in May 1936 to Tiruvannamalai was only a short one. It was long enough, anyhow, to impress with a strong feeling that I had met there, for a few moments, with **a genuine *vidvan*, an exceptionally true representative of Hindu spirituality.**

Sri Ramana Maharshi has gone through a series of psycho-spiritual experiences that are as old as the Upanishads. The teaching of the Sage Ramana, by its aphoristic character, as well as because of the intense personality of its author, enhances to the highest pitch the whole Advaitic tradition. The Maharshi's method is comprised within the simple interrogation: 'Who am I?' With him, three words only are enough to sum up the long traditional description of the way of liberation. As mentioned by the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*, "Lo, verily, it is the self that should be seen, that should be harkened to, that should be thought on, that should be pondered on …"

Ulladu Narpadu's[1] startling simile of the diver expresses most vividly his method: As one who dives, seeking to find something that has fallen into water.

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1. *Reality in Forty Verses* written by Sri Ramana.

23

Prof. Syed M. Hafiz, M.A., Ph.D., D.Litt., was Head, Dept. of Philosophy, Allahabad University.

Unlike all the saints, sages and prophets, the Maharshi is the only sage who has realised the Truth Eternal that keeps the flame of spiritual

wisdom alive. He is the perennial source of inspiration to the earnest aspirant on the path of spiritual development. Without him the world would not have had the light of the spirit to dispel the darkness of material existence. Sri Ramana embodies in him the Truth that is beyond time and space. **He stands supreme in the realm of spiritual attainment and is the true benefactor of the whole of the human race.** In him we see that glorious realisation which at once includes and transcends all religions. His teachings give the clearest expression to that one – inexpressible, universal, spiritual experience, seeking which every earnest aspirant treads the path of inward spiritual development.

The Maharshi never dogmatised, he never sermonized, never gave any mantra, or expected people to follow any set mode of worship.

What the Maharshi does for us cannot be conveyed by word of mouth. His invisible gaze, silently, unobstrusively transforms the lives of the men and women who, by virtue of their past good deeds, are gathered around him, waiting for his benign attention and paternal guidance. All his great work for the improvement and betterment of mankind is done invisibly and silently. **His silence is more eloquent, more effective, more far-reaching than the sermons of any number of teachers put together.** His grace is ever ready for us. All that we have to do is to qualify ourselves by our self-effort and self-purification to make ourselves worthy of his attention.

In March 1935, I read *A Search in Secret India* by Brunton [No.1], and visited the Ashram in December of that year. I visited the Maharshi again in 1936. The year 1937 was the most momentous in my life. I had to stay in one of the rooms of the Ashram for over a month due to my serious illness. It was during those days that **I realised vividly his greatness as a divine master endowed with all spiritual and human qualities.** While I was lying ill with high fever the Maharshi was considerate enough to visit me three times and prepare *upma* for me with his own hands.

My eyesight was affected by high fever. When parting from him I took hold of his toes and touched my eyes with them. That was sufficient guarantee of the fact in my heart that my eyesight would not fail me. So it has not. I shall never forget his grace that he gave me during my serious illness. I had no idea of what it was till I returned to my place in North India and felt its purifying effect on my life. From 1943 onwards, I never missed a year when I did not visit him. **His sense of humanity was as great as his sense of spirituality. The mere sight or tale of human suffering touched his heart.**

All he expected of us was to closely and critically analyse the content of our own being, to discover what we really were, to see if there was anything in us which survived the decay of our bodily frame. **His words went straight into our heart because he lived what he taught.**

Contact with Ramana Maharshi can change our outlook and convince us not only of the reality but also of the immense utility of spiritual values. He does not believe in propaganda of any kind, nor does he lecture to any of his numerous admirers and devotees. **Most of the time he sits silently transforming the hearts and minds of those who are privileged to be near him.** By the living example of his intensely methodical and practical life he helps and reforms us. His plain, simple and unsophisticated philosophy vividly reflected in his day-do-day conduct serves as a key to unlock the mystery of life and solves in a practical way some of the complicated social, political and economic problems that confront us today.

He enjoins on us that there is only One Self, One Life which is vibrant in every atom, One Light which is vibrant in every creature, One Love that embraces all in Oneness. According to Sri Ramana, unless you realise purity and goodness in yourself, you cannot do anything really good to 'others'.

The Sage of Arunachala is really a spiritual scientist, who has adopted the scientific method of approach to Truth by investigating the realm of the Unknown with the aid of his intuitive genius, which has assimilated reason. He has attained self-realisation through his own self-effort and intensive introspection. **He is the greatest of modern Sages of India.**[1]

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1. For an interesting episode of Prof. Syed's wife being insistent about Sri Ramana to have dinner at her place, *refer* pp.181-2.

24

A.S. Panchapagesa Ayyar belonged to the Indian Civil Service of pre-Independence era.

I was first attracted to the great Sage Ramana by reading his book *Who Am I?* I liked immensely his clear exposition of the matter

which was only the typical Hindu exposition, viz., that the real 'I' is not the gunny-bag of the body, or the Decca muslin of the mind, or the spider's web of the ego, but something above and beyond all this, viz., the *atman*. He said to one and all, "Look within. Don't look around"

Just as a skilled financier is required to direct the nation's finances, and create surpluses to pay off the debts and secure redemption, so too, individuals will require a man of God, like Ramana Maharshi, to guide them, to enable them to increase their merit and decrease their demerit, and secure redemption. No wonder then, that men of diverse temperaments have been flocking to Sri Ramanasramam to see the Sage and profit by his presence and his instruction.

The Maharshi's life is 'sacrifice of knowledge', by disseminating it to all and sundry. Anyone can go and sit near him, invited or uninvited. Anyone can partake of the homely meal in the Ashram, whether native or foreigner, high caste or outcast. The Maharshi has not the least tinge in him of caste, creed, colour, race, class, sex or country. **He has not only sacrificed all ideas of private possession in his supreme attempt of possessing the soul, he has sacrificed even the privacy of time.** He sits, day in and day out, in that little hall of his, and even sleeps in the presence of all. **He is a sublime example of what a sage ought to be.** He has never known the hold of lust for woman or money – *kamini* or *kanchanam*, to use the expressive words of Sri Ramakrishna, and is a perfect *brahmachari*. He is an embodiment of the Hindu truth that *karma, jnana* and *bhakti* are all one, and that man can attain God even in this life. He does not believe in disciples, though many claim to be his disciples. He does not advise practice of yoga, or even silence, though he has practised both. Concentrating on silence as a *muni,* he has begun to teach as a *rishi.*

To a man who stated that he could not understand the world at all, Sri Ramana replied, "As you are, so is this world. Without understanding yourself, what is the use of trying to understand the world?" To another individual, who asked the Maharshi persistently, "Why is God so unjust?" The Maharshi's cool retort was, "Why ask me? Go and ask Him?" On being told that he could not go to Him to ask Him, the swift retort was, "When you cannot reach Him, how can you question Him?"

We are indeed lucky in having the Maharshi in our midst. It will be a thousand pities if a spiritual dynamo like that of Sri Ramana is not utilised to its fullest extent. He requires no permission; he charges no fee; he does not require conformity to any dogma. **He is like the rivers and mountains, the common property of mankind.**

25

Prof. T.M.P. Mahadevan, M.A., Ph.D., was Head, Dept. of Philosophy, Madras University.

We hear of Shuka and Yajnavalkya; and we read of Gaudapada and Sankara. But here we have before our eyes a contemporary witness to the Eternal Truth of the Vedanta, an eloquent commentary on the Upanishads. We for the most part seem to be so small in his presence, bound as we are in the coils of time.

The Maharshi tells that we will never get at Reality if we take the appearance to be real: the dream world appears all too real to us so long as we are in it; but as soon as we are awake, we realise its unsubstantiality.

The Maharshi seldom talks. He believes that the Self is best taught in silence. He says, "Silence is ever speaking, it is the perennial flow of language." For the benefit of those who cannot understand the language of Silence, the Maharshi sometimes talks, but he warns at the same time that questions and answers lie within the region of *avidya*. Till the dawn of wisdom, doubts will necessarily arise. Once the Self is realised there will be no problem to be solved.

The Maharshi's method of Self-enquiry ends in mental suicide; it provides an instrument whereby the mind destroys itself, thus revealing the Self. The Maharshi directs us to put ourselves the question, 'Who am I?' But this is not an empty formula or a barren mantra to be muttered. Patient, intelligent and unsparing effort is required before progress could be registered on this arduous journey.

The Maharshi teaches that the Heart, on the right side of the chest, is the seat of the Self. He makes it very clear that any reference to the physical body is only from the empirical point of view. From the absolute standpoint it is impossible to locate the Heart or Self in any place either inside the body or outside. So, when any particular part of the body is spoken of as the seat of the Self, it is so described only as an aid to the layman's understanding.

It would not be possible to realise the Self, if there is attachment to the objects of senses. The Maharshi told a *grihastha* (who was tormented by the thought that this was a despicable position, unhelpful to spiritual achievement): "Whether you continue in the household or renounce it and go to the forest, your mind haunts you. The obstacle is the mind; it must be

got over whether in the home or in the forest." These words, however, should be interpreted with great care. They were given in an answer to a *grihastha* who was trying to assess the relative value of his own *asrama* and *sannyasa*. If he was really keen on renunciation, he would not have argued or hesitated. One who feels the burning heat of a red-hot iron rod does not take even the space of a moment to let go his hold of it.

When I first saw the Master, his head had begun to nod. The shaking head seemed to me saying *'neti', 'neti',* (not this, not this). Many who came with long list of questions used to depart in silence after sitting for a while in the Master's presence. When he chose to answer questions, each sentence was like a text from the Upanishad, so full of meaning that it required calm, silent pondering over in order to be understood fully.

Having been a student of the *Gita* since childhood I saw in Bhagavan a vivid and living commentary on that great scripture. In 1948-49, during my lecture tour of the United States, I often said that if there was anyone living in India answering to the truth of the Vedanta, it was Ramana Maharshi.

The critics of *advaita* usually say that the *advaitin* is an austere intellectual in whom the wells of feeling have all dried up. Those who have seen the Master will know how unfounded such a criticism is. Sri Ramana was ever brimming with the milk of divine kindness. Even members of the subhuman species had their share of the unbounded love of the Master. **He was a consummate artist in life. Anything that he touched became orderly and pleasant.**[1]

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1. The write-up, except the last three paras, was written in collaboration with Swami Rajeswarananda, no. 97.

26

Duncan Greenlees, M.A. (Oxon.), a scholar and a Theosophist, visited India on a teaching assignment in the 1930s.

The writer who first felt repelled after reading about the greatness of Sri Ramana in* A Search in Secret India *by British journalist Brunton (no.1), says:

The book struck me somehow as a piece of journalism of the lower kind. For a few days it almost dissuaded me from going to Tiruvannamalai. Had the Maharshi stooped to allow this kind of vulgar

advertisement for himself, almost like a quack doctor seeking testimonials? Of course, I soon threw this foolishness off my mind, and went to see for myself.

I saw the Maharshi. It did not take long for me to be sure that I was in front of one who had, in that very body, solved life's problem for himself. The radiant peace around him proved it beyond all cavil. **The calm, like that of the midnight sky, was something too real to question for a moment. The part of my search thus was over, even at the first glimpse. In a flash I had seen a 'Master'.** I *knew* he was what the books call a *jivanmukta*. Please don't ask me how I *knew* for I cannot answer that. It was just as one knows that water is wet and the sky is blue. It could not be denied – self-evident is the word.

I had brought the usual list of questions to be asked. Shyness kept me silent while sitting in the Hall during those first days. And before I broke that silence, the unspoken questions had solved themselves in their own irrelevance. It was a common experience; I only add my own testimony to that of many others. Before I left that hallowed spot, I did put questions to the Maharshi, which were answered in a wonderful way that was new to me. I was wholly satisfied and filled with joy.

The four days I had planned were soon over. But I could not tear myself away before the last date of the vacation [of the educational institution where he was teaching], and stayed on, delighted, enthralled and pacified. That stillness of eternal depths had somehow seeped itself into my heart. I had met a Master who could quell the waves with a silent word, 'Peace, be still!' I knew myself to be absolutely one with that incarnate Peace on the sofa, and therefore to be one equally with the Unmanifest in whose stillness he was so obviously poised.

God's grace is such that He gives at His will what He likes to give to any soul. We cannot *earn* His grace, even by crores of years of effort. One can never be worthy of His blessings, but receives it purely out of His mercy. His *darshan* can never be the fruit of *sakama tapasya,* whatever certain books may say. It is only the overflowing love of the Lord that brings Him to us.

The peace that Bhagavan had put upon me remained in my heart, like a shining cloud of transparency through which all things passed dreamlike for about three weeks. **The mind was caught and held in that peace in a blissfulness it had never known before. It is a pity I cannot bring about this mood at my own will: it can come only from the touch of the real Teacher of souls, as I have found.**

One day in the Hall I was browsing a notebook of extracts on yoga. Bhagavan hardly ever spoke to me first (indeed there was very little actual talking between us during the years; it did not seem necessary, somehow), but that day he spoke to me in English: "What is that book?" I answered him. He said quietly, "Read Milarepa".[1] I read the book; it thrilled and stirred deep places in my heart. Somehow, I feel Bhagavan had seen that it would be so and therefore gave me the only order of the sort he had ever given me.

I have taken all the descriptions of the *jivanmukta* I could find in any scripture – Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Christian, Muslim, Jain etc. I have watched Bhagavan under all kinds of circumstances, and checked up what I have seen with those descriptions. I have not the smallest doubt that he alone, of the men I have seen, dwells always in *sahaja samadhi.* Of course, I am not qualified to judge, for none but the saint can know the saint.

I have seen him in a humorous mood. I have seen him play the host with delicate grace that seemed almost awkward at times. I have seen him quickly, motionlessly, challenging and defeating injustice or unkindness. I have seen him cutting vegetables for the Ashramites long before the dawn. I have seen again and again how he solved the doubts, the agonies, the loss of faith of people of many types – often with a word, often with his healing silence and a soft distance in his unmoving gaze. I have looked at his perfect handwriting in many scripts, all a model of beauty and care. I have heard him correcting the singers of hymns in his own glory, with an absolute impersonality that was obvious.

I have watched his reactions to the noisy devotee, the lazy worker, the mischievous monkey, the crazed adorer, the over-bold flatterer, the one who would exploit his name. I have seen how totally impervious he was to all considerations of power, place, prestige, and how his grace shined equally on prince and peasant. **Then, can I doubt that here indeed we have, if not God Himself – for He is omnipresent – at least Greatness incarnate, the majesty of the ancient hills blending with the sweetness of the evening star?**

Sit before him, as we used to sit those summer evenings, and we knew that we were not that foolish excited little person sitting there, but the eternal Self out of whom this world has spun its cobweb yarn of forms.

I know no other man whose mere presence has thus enabled me to make the personality drop down in the abyss of nothingness, where it belongs. I have found no other human being who so emanates his grace that it can catch away the ordinary man from his stillness and plunge him deep in the ecstasy of timeless omnipresent being.

His grace, which of course is the grace of God whose representative and messenger he is, has been enough to give brief glimpses even to me of that infinity, wherein he always seemed to live.

He will brush away all this nonsense of my talk with a wave of hand and a smile, while saying as he once did, "It is the same in this and in another place. That bliss you feel is in the Self, and you superimpose it upon the place or environment in which you are bodily set." But, Bhagavan, we say what we like about you and the blessings we have received *from you*; we shall not let you interrupt our foolish words. It is our chance to publicly proclaim our debt to the silent Teacher of Tiruvannamalai.

Those who are in the Ashram are very gentle, considerate and kindly. The generous services were given by a friend who used to translate for me the Tamil answers to my English questions and got translations approved by Bhagavan himself before giving them to me. Even the human hospitality of Bhagavan himself, though sometimes a little embarrassing to my innate shyness perhaps, was always a delightful thing.

His very presence among us is a benediction. His attaining a clear and unflickering vision of the Self has raised the whole world a little nearer to the Truth. His words have been an unfathomed ocean of comfort and inspiration to thousands. His silent peacefulness has revealed the Eternal in human form, as mountains, seas and skies above can usually reveal It.

***The following was written after the Maharshi's* mahanirvana:**

Can we say he is dead? Bhagavan dead? The word could have no meaning. How can he who lives in the entire universe ever taste of death? "You think I am going away? But where am I to go? I shall remain here with you." That was his promise while he was preparing us for separation. And those of us who lived in Tiruvannamalai hold firmly to the faith, which we feel confirmed by continual experience, that he has kept that promise and is still to be contacted here in the Ashram as of old.

Like Surdas[2] darkening the physical sight so that he might see clearly the light within, he has dimmed our outer sight so that the inner vision might be filled with his eternal light. He has veiled the outer form we loved so well, that its beauty might no longer draw our gaze away from the everlasting presence enthroned in our inmost Heart. His Light shines, with the everlasting clarity of God's own Light.

Extracts from his poem:

Sri Arunachala Ramana

Crowds gather always at His flower-feet,
The fragrant blossom does not seek the bee,
Its essence floats upon the waiting air,
And fainting creatures hasten to the Source,
To lose themselves within the sweetness hid
Deep in its resting Heart, and there to swoon
Away in all-transcending endless bliss.

* * *

O Siva-Yogi, Mighty God, to Thee,
Incarnate in this Silent One, whose gaze
Can shrivel at a glance dark Passion, and
The clouds of ignorance that swirl around.
The ever-blissful and all-seeing Self,
To Thee we offer flowers of our desire.
Inspire within our hearts the soaring Flame
That burns each Kartik on this Glory-hill.

* * *

Oh Arunachala, Reveal the one
The only Being Immanent, the Self
Within the dreaming self. Strike down our fears,
And in our eager souls drop quietly
The fragrant dews of the One Guru's grace,
Till at their magic touch all bonds decay, –
Sivatma reigning, Sea of motionless Peace,
Still as the rocks of Arunagiri.

* * *

Stayed in Heart of Arunachala
Is Lord of Silence and Self of all.

* * *

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1. Dr. Evans-Wentz's book *Tibet's Great Yogi Milarepa.*
2. Famous Hindi poet who is reputed to have made himself blind.

27

H. Ghosh, M.A., was Principal of Holkar College, Indore, Madhya Pradesh.

When I first had the good fortune of being introduced to the Great Sage of Arunachala, my imagination was struck by the austerity and simplicity of his sublime countenance. This austerity is indelibly marked on his face and cannot escape the attention of even a casual observer. One great outcome of this austere simplicity is humbleness of the mind.

We are enjoined by the Maharshi to forsake, once and forever, our petty selves and to approach our divine self. The noblest pursuit, according to the Maharshi, is the pursuit of our Overself. The joys are perennial and the pursuit eternal.

Sri Bhagavan is not a mere mystic. He does not look into some future world, but gazes intently on what is real and eternal in him. Heaven to him is not a far-off place: here in your heart and nowhere, the soul of all things is to be found. Only those who have put away all selfish longings may see clearly the radiance of happiness. Something of this happiness the worst sinners among us will feel in the presence of this exalted and self-illumined Sage of Arunachala.

Many devotees go to Sri Bhagavan for a miraculous cure of their physical ailments or for a wondrous change in their worldly destiny. Sri Bhagavan rightly warns us against the allurements of miracles or clairvoyance or prophetic powers. But if anyone invokes Him in a spirit of absolute trust, his prayers will be answered.

In all humility I confess that I am the least competent to write about Sri Bhagavan. The finite can never know the Infinite and the Illimitable. **A silent look or an encouraging word from Him will do much more good than all the sermonic literature of the world.**

28

C.S. Bagi, M.A., was Principal of Lingaraj College, Belgaum, Karnataka.

Sri Bhagavan's existence and operations being mysteries, their explanations can have no finality. In explaining one mystery we straightaway

land ourselves in others equally, if not more perplexing. **It is easy to remember but impossible to know Sri Bhagavan.**

Every man judges Sri Bhagavan by the measure of his own self. But no judgement of him can be right unless the judge transcends himself. Sri Bhagavan is the Immutable Law. His greatness is in preserving the Law and not in playing juggler's tricks of turning cocks into bulls and *vice versa*. **Every adjective we employ in describing Him does more justice to our own sentiments with regard to Him than His with regard to Himself. He is not the duality we are. But this is certain: whether indifferent or sympathetic, in either case the world gains by Him as it does from skies whether they are sulky or sunny.**

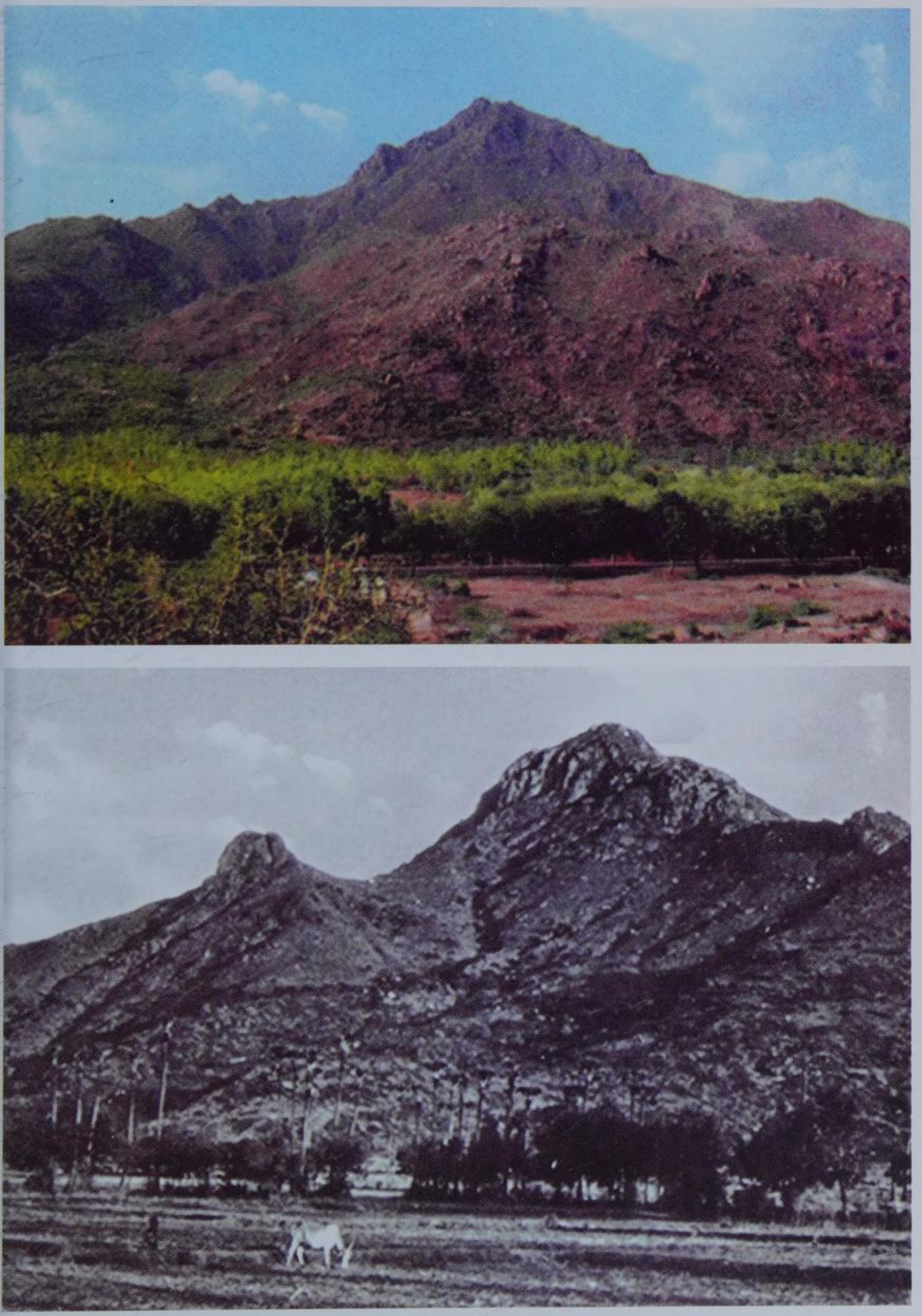
Mysterious are His ways with men. Though nothing unusual happens at the time of *darshan* to a curious pilgrim, a mild surprise overtakes him later when he begins to note subtle proclivities in his mode of living and thinking – nay, perhaps in external affairs too. **Sins of whole lives are forgiven by one act of His Grace. Faith and hope are the only price the sinner pays for His forgiveness.**

Sri Bhagavan's life is a demonstration of the great potentials that lie hidden in the most ordinary and unpromising souls. We learn from Him what self-deceived shadows we are all, entombed in toiling body-minds – mere fantasies of a narrow dream called life. The wary of us will question themselves, 'Is this life a toilsome delusion?' Who is to blame? Should we not rather blame ourselves who take the delusion seriously, when our better judgement asks us to wake up?

'Know thyself' is the burden of Sri Bhagavan's teaching as it is the breath of His being. As a process it is the persistent inquiry into the uninquiring self. The question 'Who Am I' is a razor's edge and cuts through all other questions that earthly imagination may conceive. All questions resolve themselves into it. Who Am I? is the question of questions and goes directly to the root of every problem and sums up the entire spirit of quest.

The mind seems to conspire against itself. The limpid stream of pure consciousness called 'I' is contaminated by throwing into it the rubbish of not-'I'.We are a stranger to ourself by claiming everything ours except ourself.

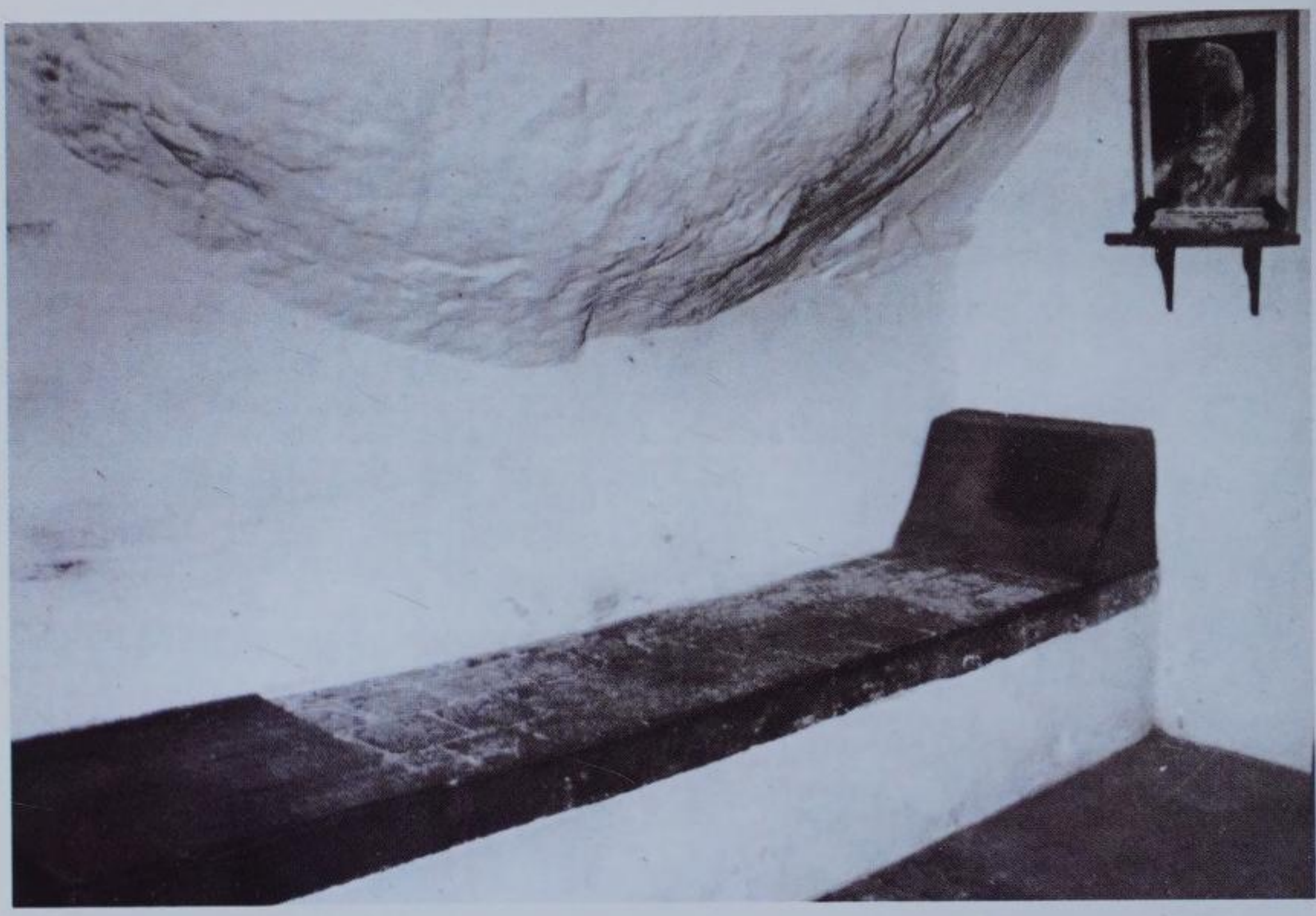
We surrender our judgement to Sri Bhagavan whose life has been to us a reassurance against gloom and despair. May His pleasure be our aim in what we think and talk, and His remembrance in what we do. He knows all our errors and sins. We err even to ask for deliverance. May His Grace be everywhere!

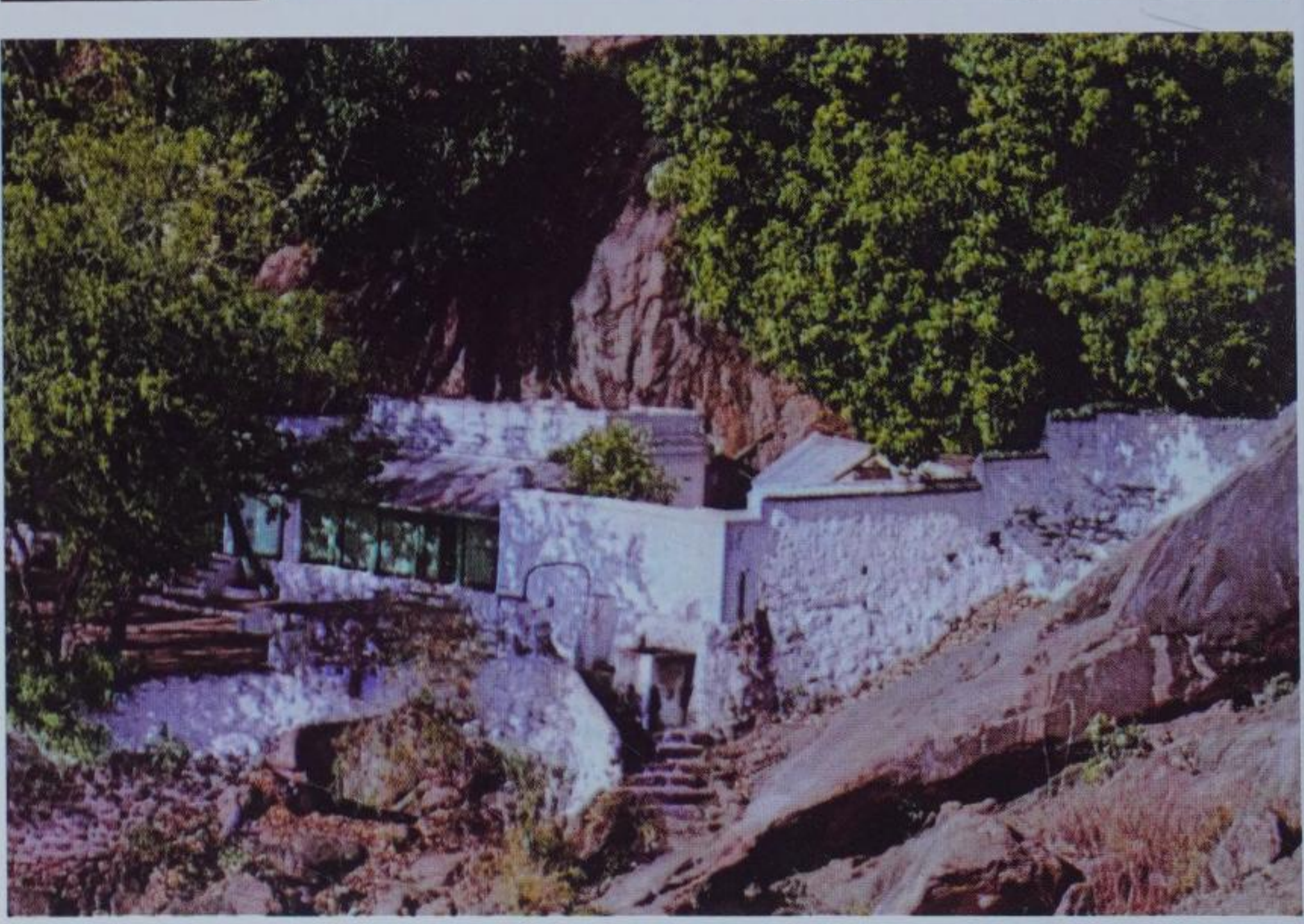


Two views of mountain Arunachala known to be Lord Siva Himself, who drew Sri Ramana to Tiruvannamalai, *Refer* p.1 & p. 410.

Ancient Siva temple which sheltered Sri Ramana for many months after he reported arrival in 1896 to his Father Lord Siva in the temple. *Refer* pp. 410-1.

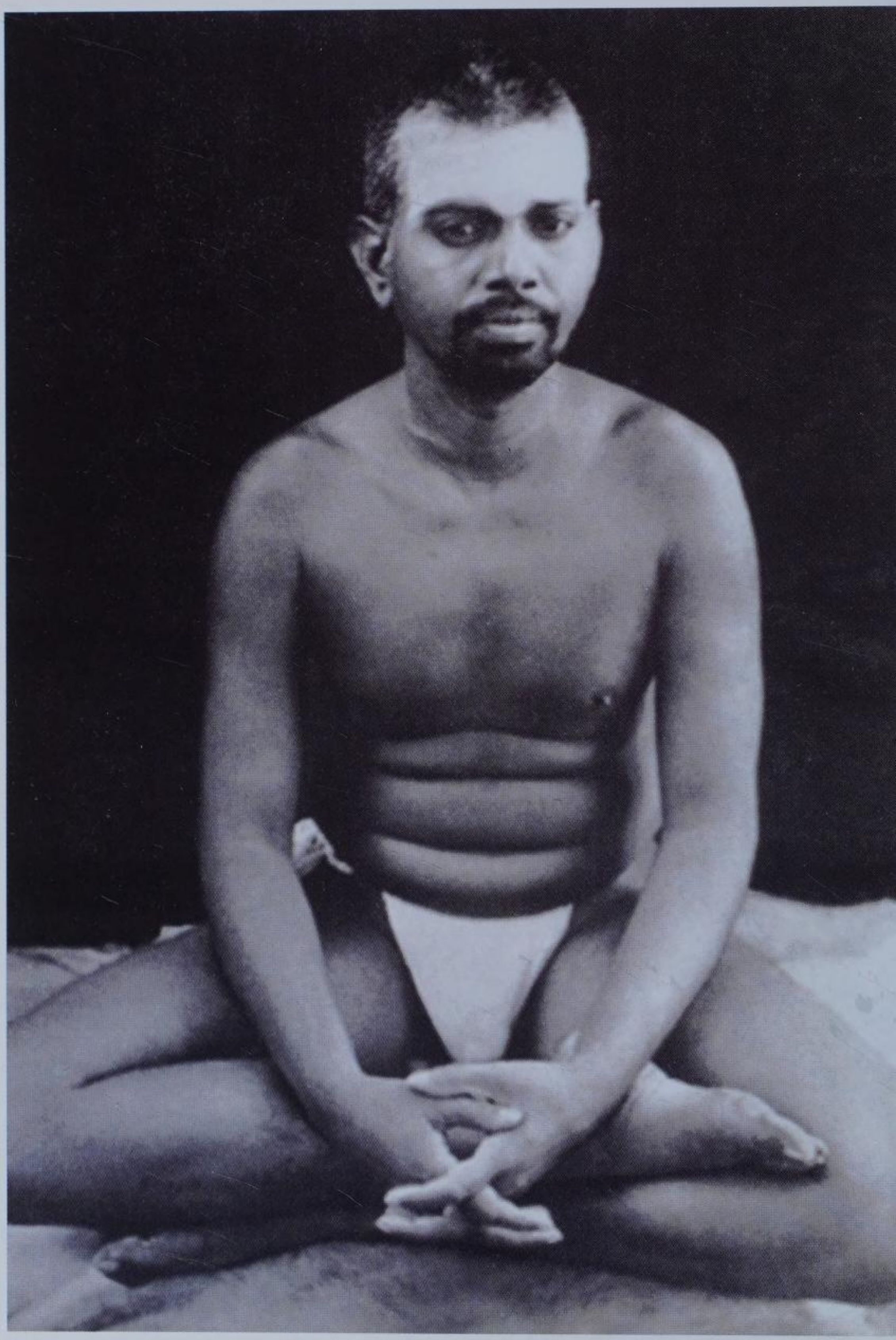
(i) Virupaksha cave on mountain Arunachala is about 1400 ft. above sea level. It was Sri Ramana's abode from 1899 to 1916.
(ii) *Samadhi* of Virupakshadeva inside the cave. *Refer* p.7.



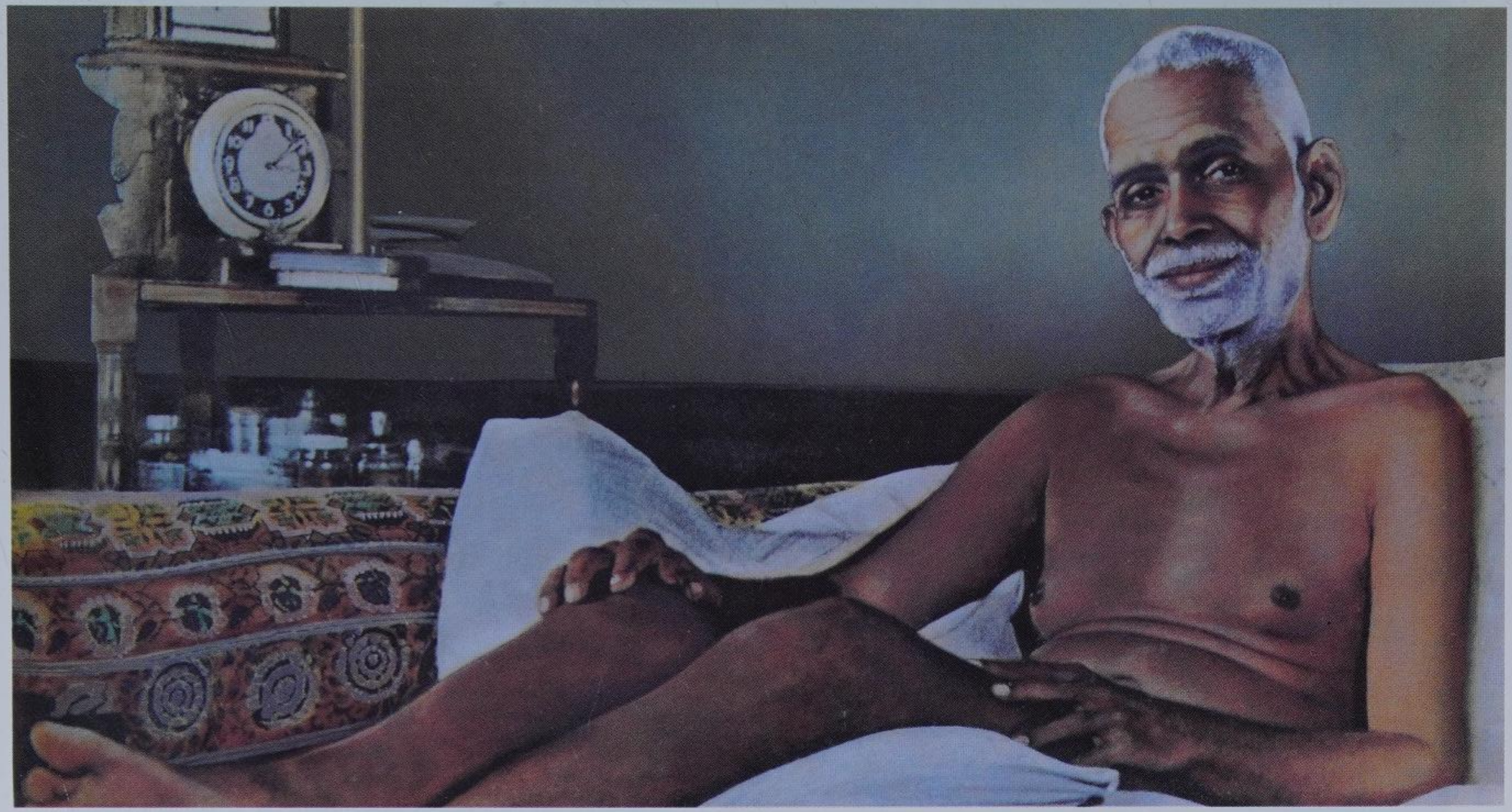


(i) Front room in Virupaksha cave.
(ii) Skandasram on mountain Arunachala is about 1500 ft. above sea level. It was abode of Sri Ramana from 1916 to 1922. *Refer* p. 8.

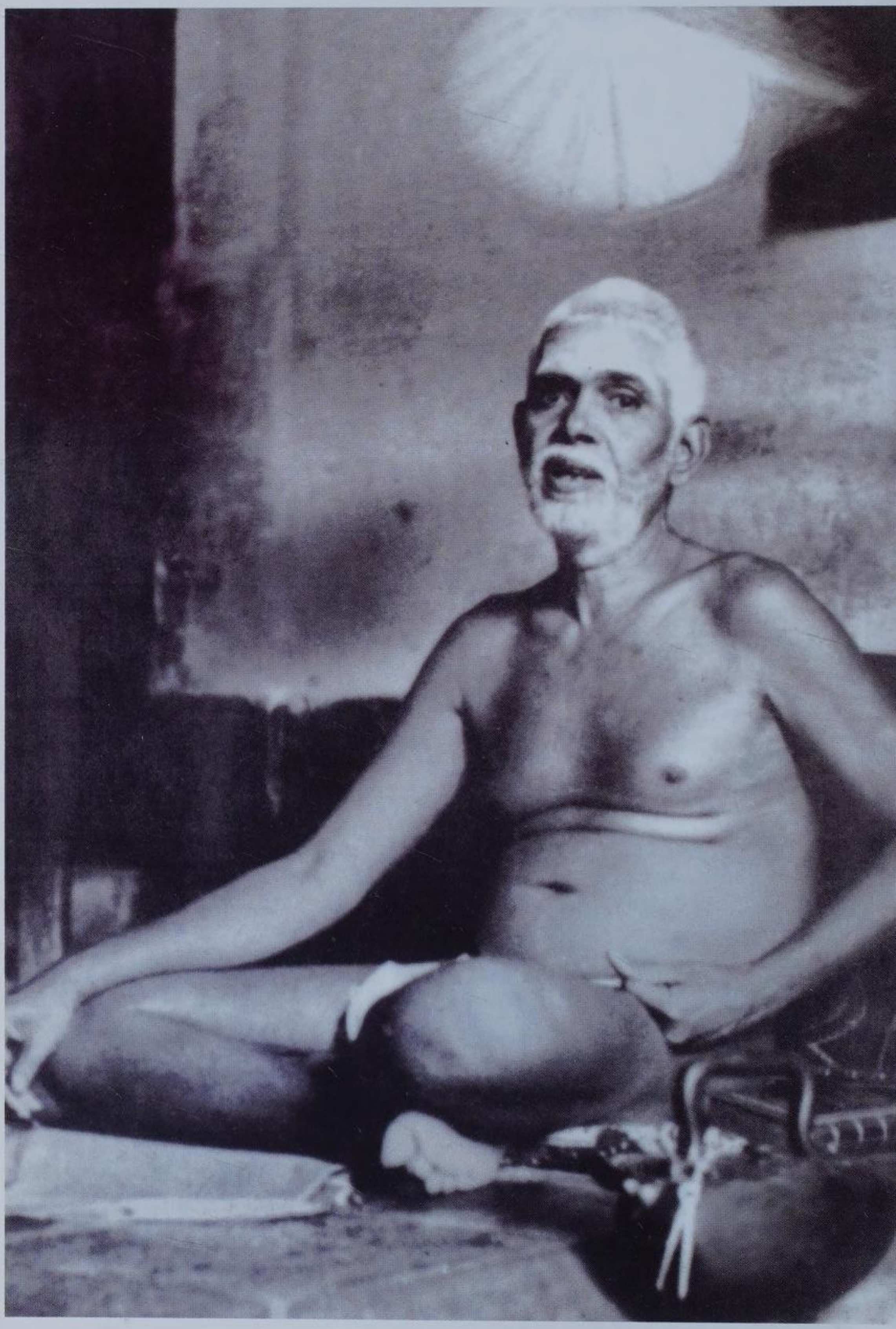
Sri Ramana with large and penetrating eyes.
Earliest available photo – 1900 or 1901.



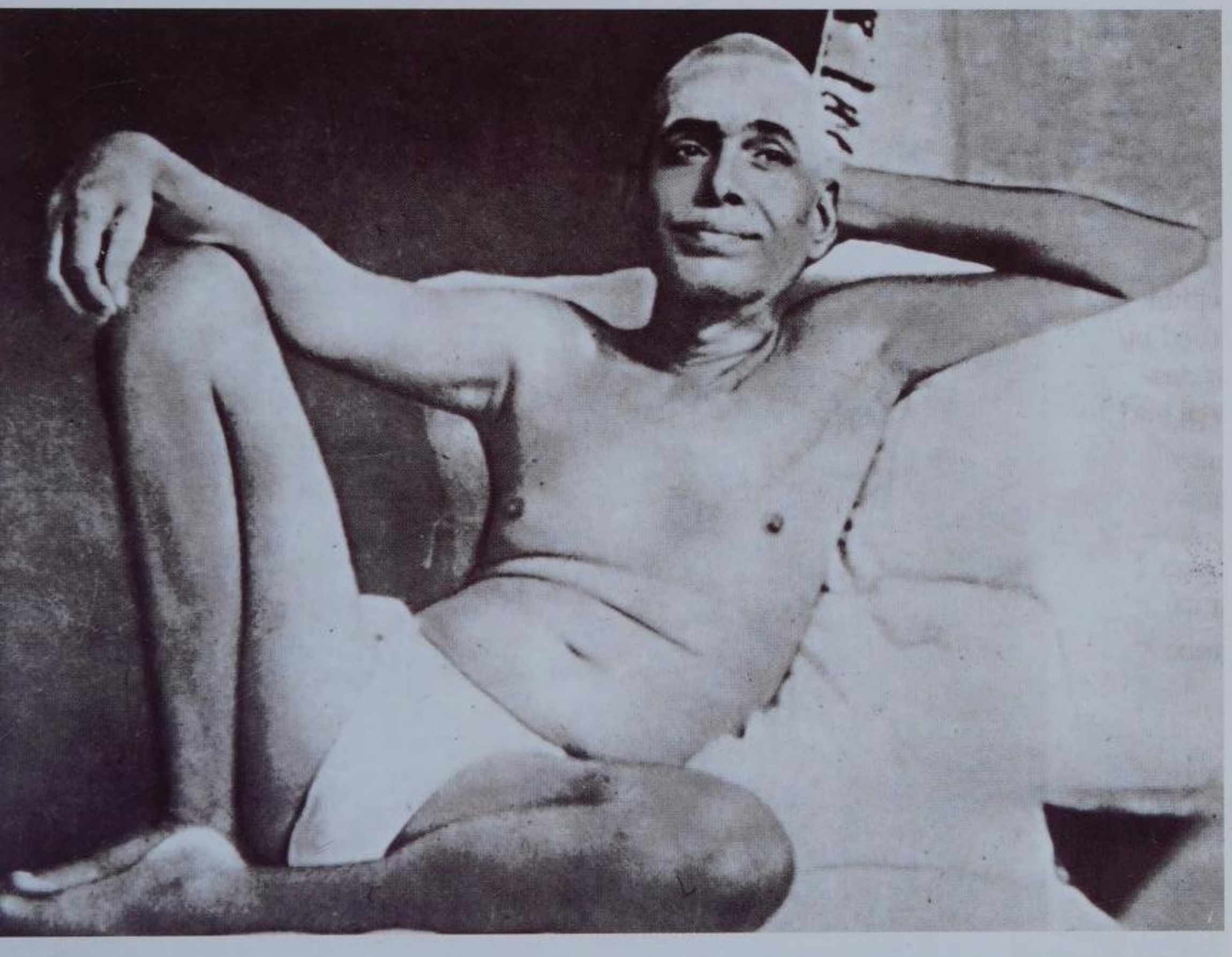
Sri Ramana exuding peace and *sakti* in his late 30's.

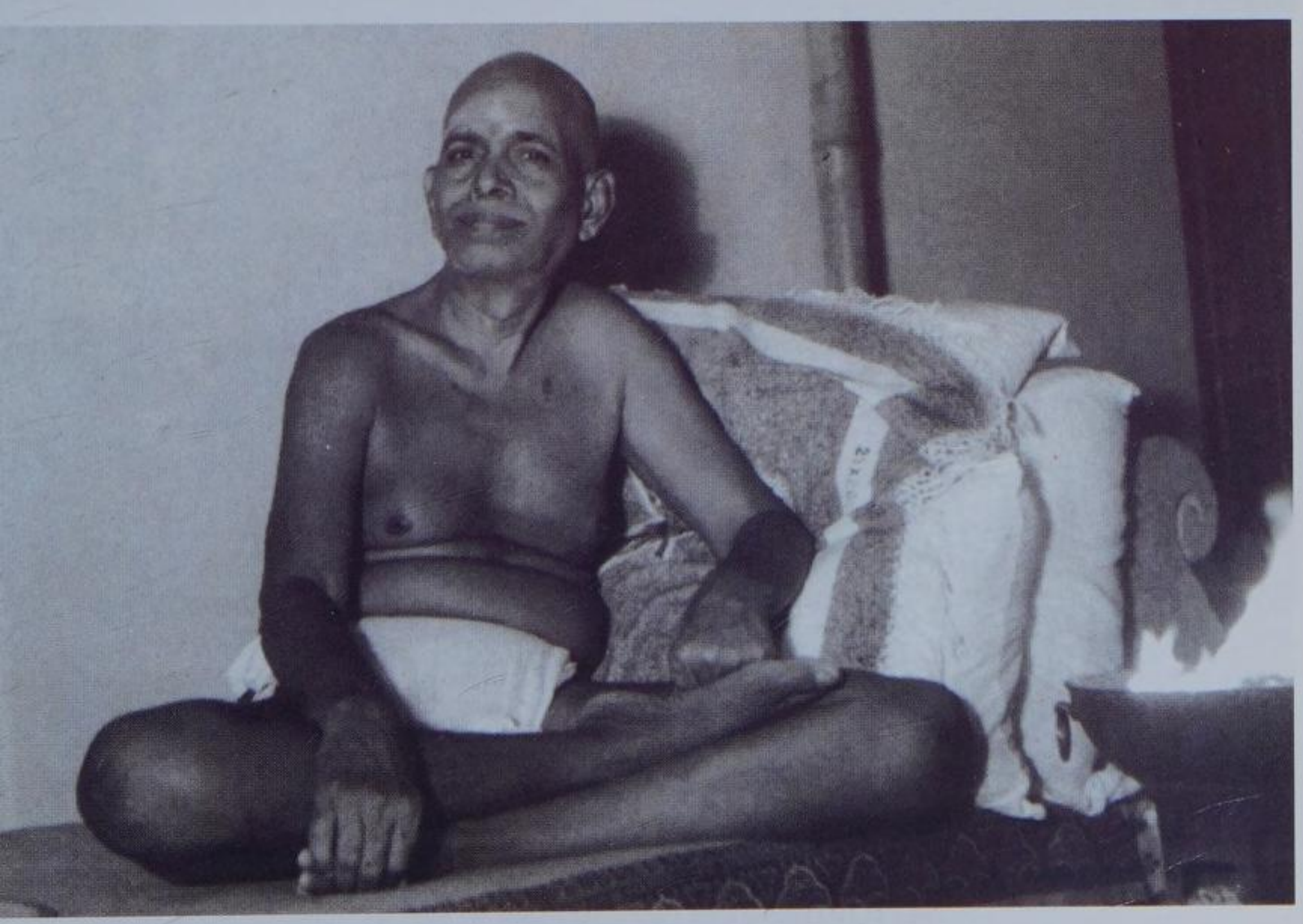


Sri Ramana on the couch in the old hall where devotees benefited from his presence for more than 20 years.
(December 1947 photo)

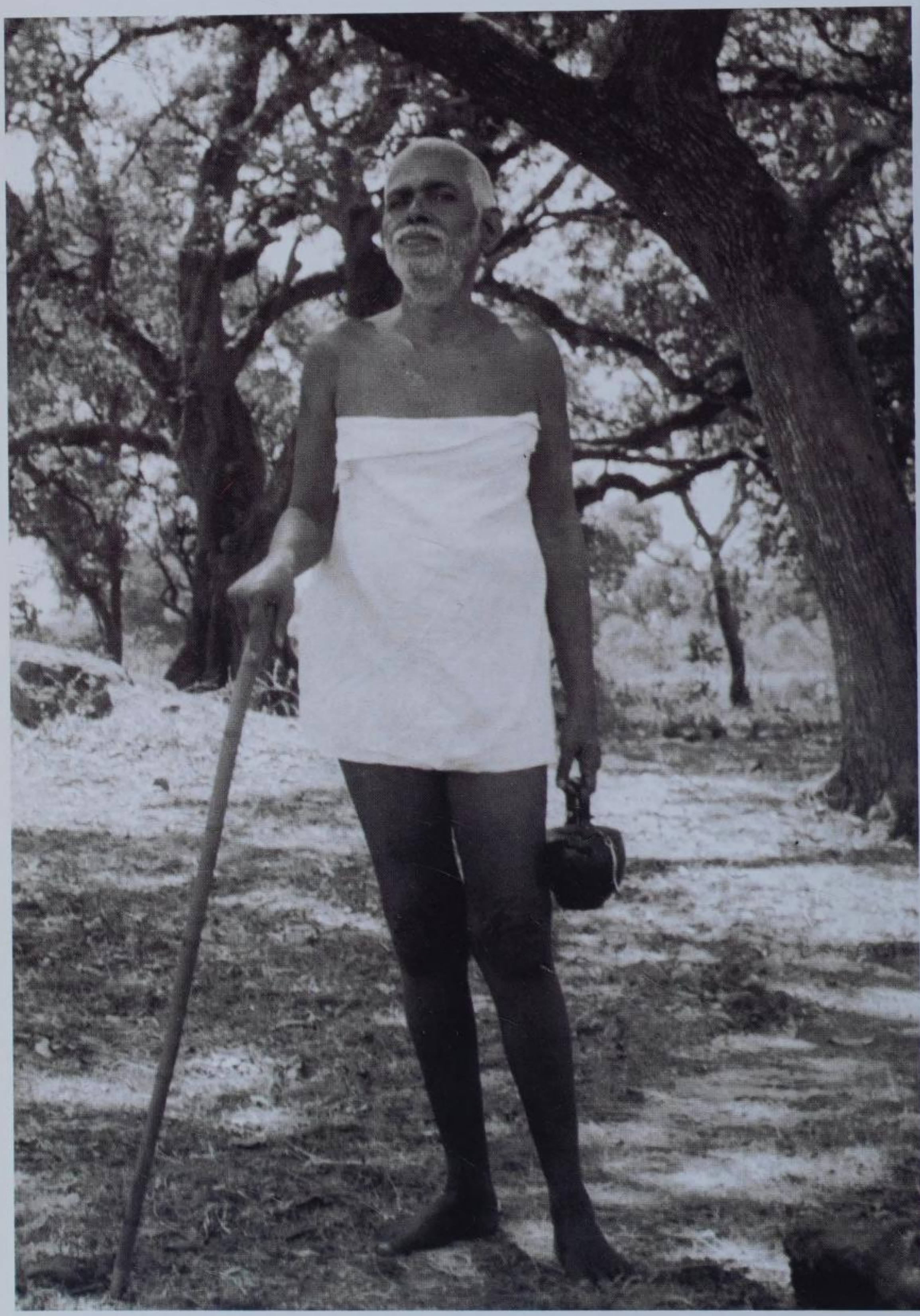


Sri Ramana – Detachment incarnate.

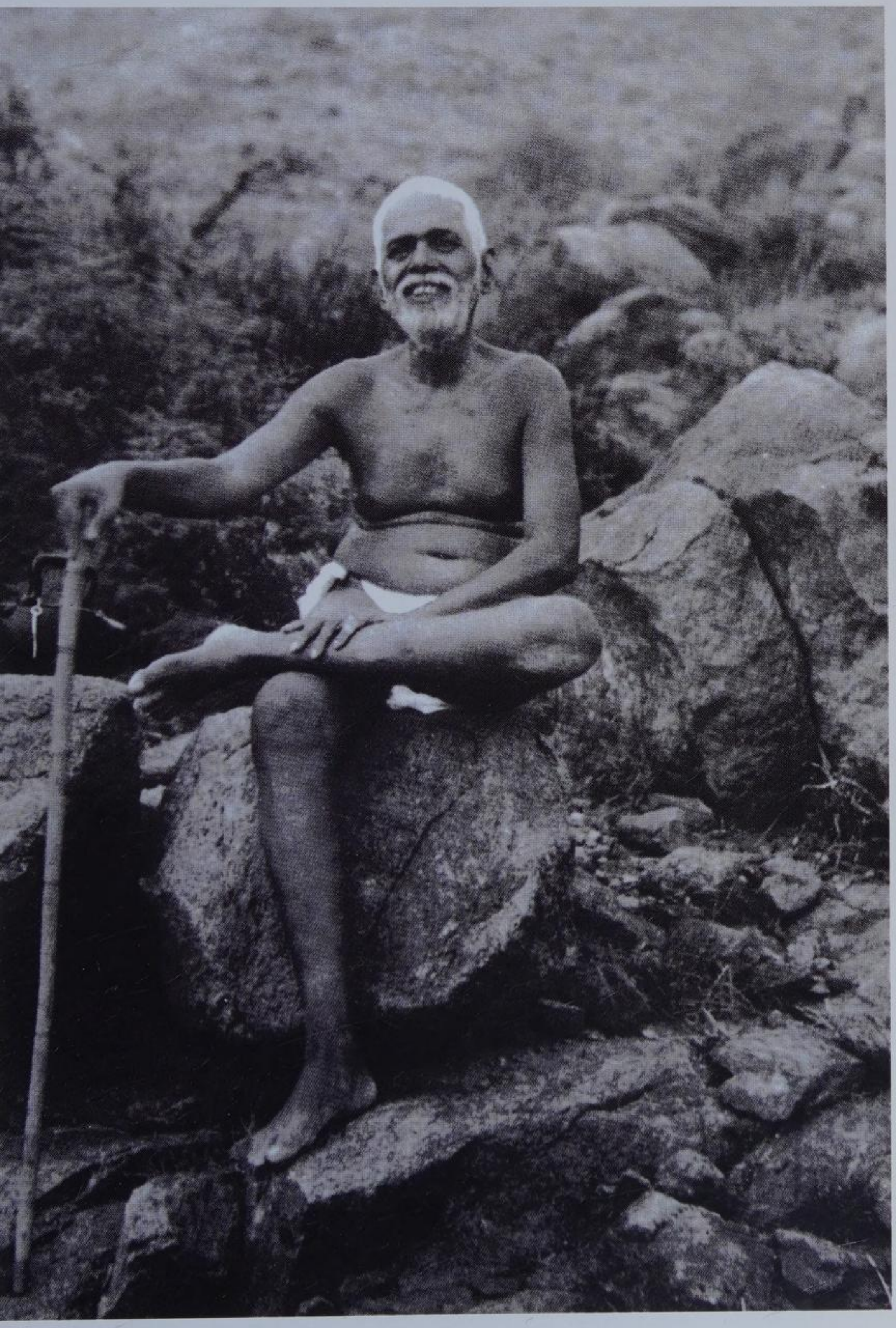




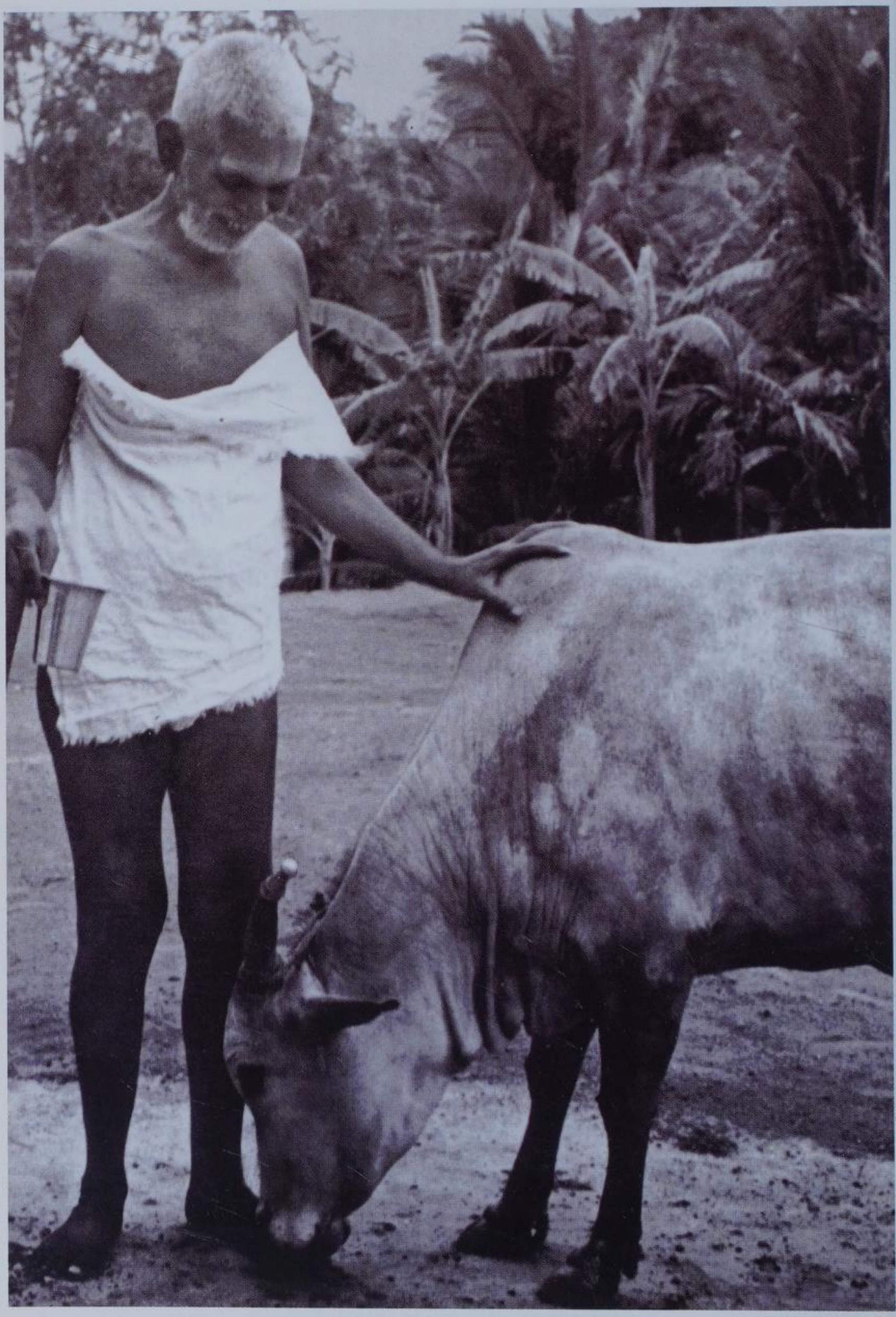
Blissful Radiance of Sri Ramana – two images.



Sri Ramana on his afternoon stroll.
He never wore footwear of any type. *Refer* pp. 278-9.



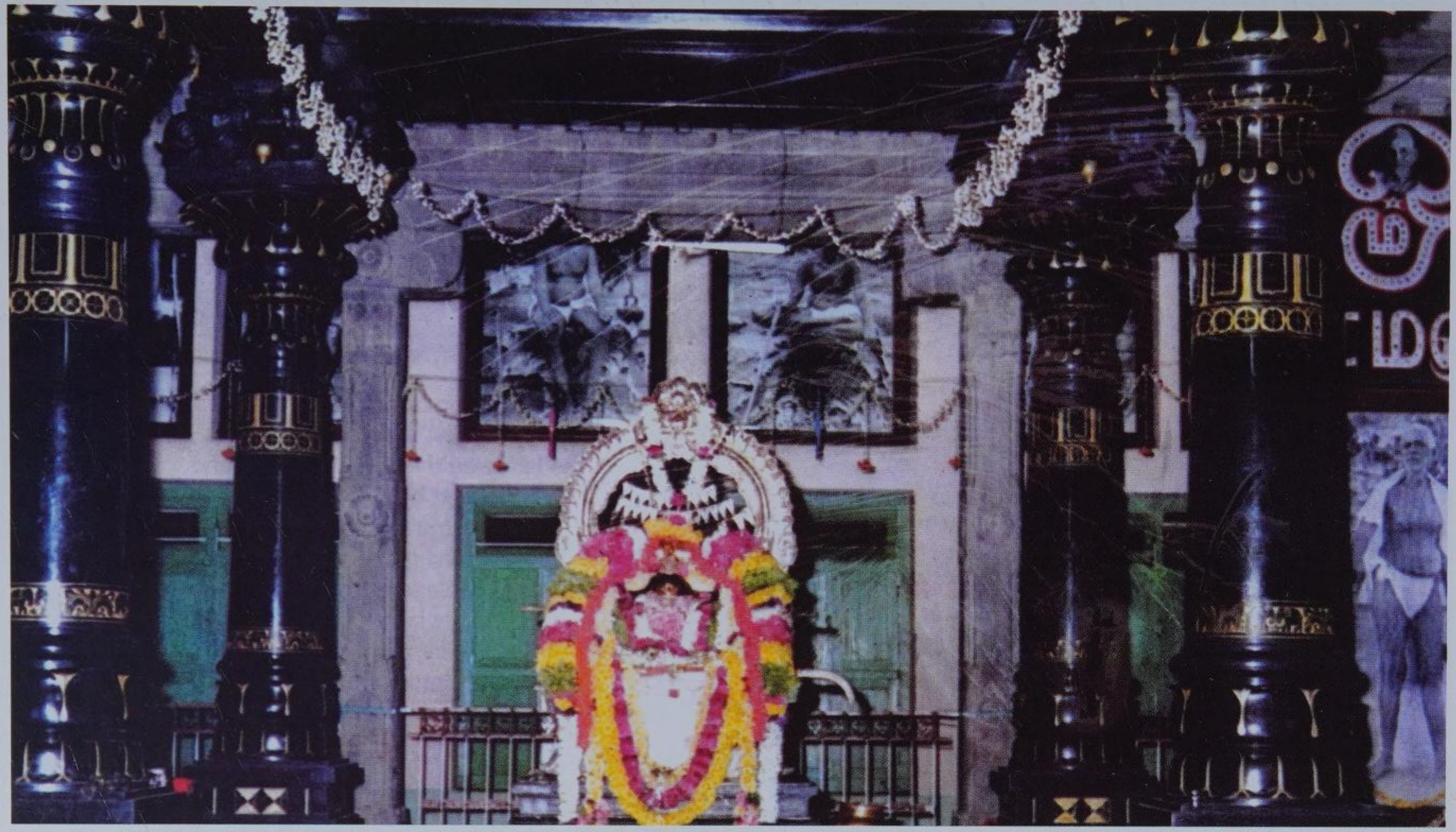
Sri Ramana rests on the lap of his beloved Arunachala. *Refer* pp.410-1.



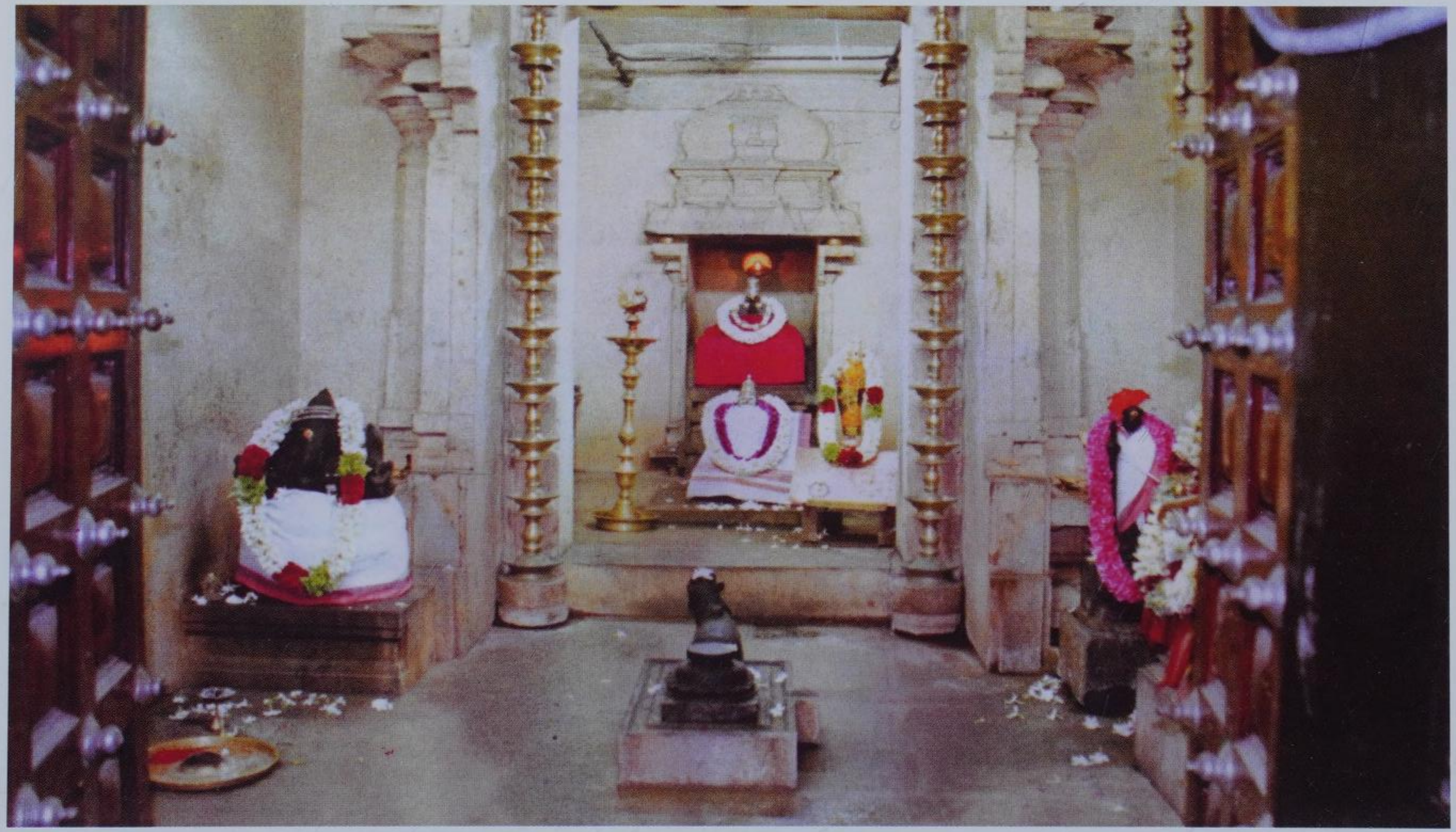
Sri Ramana showers affection on Cow Lakshmi. *Refer* pp. 414-5.

Swami Paramahansa Yogananda and Paul Brunton with Sri Ramana.
The lady on the left was accompanying Swami Yogananda. (November 1935)

Entrance to the shrines of Sri Ramana and the Mother at Sri Ramanasramam, Tiruvannamalai.



Ramaneswaralingam, *samadhi* shrine of Sri Ramana.



Matrubhuteswaralingam, *samadhi* shrine of the Mother.

Dr. Rajendra Prasad and Jamana Lal Bajaj (wife and daughter on his right) and devotees of Sri Ramanasramam with Sri Ramana (August 1938). *Refer* p.104 & p.132.

Sri Ramana on his seat in the Jubilee hall. The shed was erected in 1946 for Golden Jubilee Celebrations of Sri Ramana's arrival at Tiruvannamalai in 1896. Sri Ramana also gave *darshan* in this hall for quite some time after the Jubilee Celebrations were over.

One word more. **Whatever may be written about Sri Bhagavan, there is no such thing as knowing Him. Remembrance is all.** May He be in the remembrance of all who seek the Truth about themsleves!

An extract from his poem:

The Leonine Power

Oh flaming Lion, Stern, Majestic, Holy,
Who can approach, yet who escape Thy Paws?
Oh Sovereign Lord, to be Thy sport is jolly,
For after Sport I dine in Nectarine Jaws!
Yet spare me not my Lord, destroy me all,
Lest slipping Thee I suffer shameful fall!

* * *

29

Rudra Raj Pande, M.A., was Principal of Tri-Chandra College, Nepal.

When I read *A Search in Secret India* by Brunton [No. 1], a passion grew in me to see the Maharshi. On reaching Tiruvannamalai, when led to the presence of the Sage, I was surprised not to find at first sight anything particularly remarkable about him.

Before visiting the Ashram, I had carefully formulated many questions to be put to the Sage. However, when I listened to what the Maharshi said in reply to questions put to him by others, I could not help feeling that all my questions ceased to have any particular significance. I found out later that many a visitor had similar experience.There must be something in the personality of the Sage to explain all this. But I was still very skeptical. I even abstained from prostrating at his feet.

As I had to leave Tiruvannamalai the same day, I thought of visiting the great Siva Temple,[1] and asked the Maharshi's permission to go there. My guide took me to the interior of the temple, which was rather dark. As he shouted "Arunachala" all my attention was directed to the *lingam* in the sanctum sanctorum.

But, strange to say, instead of the *lingam* I saw the image of the Maharshi, his smiling countenance, his brilliant eyes looking at me. And what is more strange, it is not one Maharshi that I see, nor two, nor three – in hundreds I see the same smiling countenance, those lustrous eyes, I see them wherever I may look in the sanctum sanctorum. My eyes did not catch the full figure of the Maharshi, but only the smiling face above the chin. I am in raptures, and beside myself with inexpressible joy. That bliss and calmness of mind I then felt, how could words describe? Tears of joy flowed down my cheeks. I would never forget the deep intimate experience I had in the ancient temple.

I hurried back to the Ashram. A swami presented me to the Sage and told him in Tamil that I was to leave to be in time at the station. The Maharshi looked at me and smiled. I felt as if he was enquiring whether I felt satisfied with what I saw in the temple. Satisfied! Sri Bhagavan's Grace has captivated my heart. My gratitude to him knew no bounds. I lovingly cherish the sublime experience I had.

People may call the vision I had in the temple, a hallucination, but that bliss, that peace, that depth of feeling which melted my very being and made it over to the care of the Lord, the joy and deep sense of gratitude I now feel while I recollect the past – these certainly are no optical illusions. The Lord in my heart is my eternal witness, I meekly put myself under his care and I am his forever. Thus ended my first visit to Sri Ramanasramam.

Based on his study of Sri Ramana literature and second visit to the Ashram after sometime, he wrote:

We want to draw a circle without caring to decide or even to consider in the first instance as to where the center should be. And having drawn hardly a fraction of the circumference, we go on shifting the center. What wonder then that in the end we do not at all complete the figure of a circle? To be able to achieve anything commensurate with man's intellectual capacity, he must seek in the first instance the center of his being and be firmly established therein. To achieve this end *atma-vichara* is the means par excellence.

Sri Ramana does not consider the question of reality or otherwise of the world as of first importance. According to him, it is both undesirable and foolish to dispute the reality or unreality of the world, when one has not the right knowledge of oneself. Sri Ramana shifts the emphasis from the "What is the nature of the world?" to the much more vital question, "Who am I?"This in my view is the most substantial contribution the Maharshi makes to the world thought.

My earnest conviction is that both believers and skeptics will benefit immensely by a little close association with the Sage. How skeptics become believers in the light-radiating presence of the "Light of Arunachala" – Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi, is quite an ordinary occurrence of Sri Ramanasramam. My own experience may be adduced in proof of the point. To quote Grant Duff [No. 7]:"Should those who have it in their power to visit the Ashram delay, they will have only themselves to blame in future lives."[2]

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1. *Refer* annexure-I, p. 410.
2. The quote is from the preface of *Sri Ramana Gita,* Sri Ramanasramam. It was written in London in 1935.

30

Prof. S.V. Ram, M.A., Ph.D., was Head, Dept. of Political Science, Lucknow University.

I had heard previously much about the spiritual pre-eminence of Sri Maharshi; it is only recently that I had the good fortune of coming into direct contact with him. One of the most remarkable features about Sri Maharshi is that his teachings are mirrored to perfection in his life. Abidance in the Self, declares the Sage, is the highest attainment, and it is in this State Transcendent does one find him at all times. It is a still more remarkable fact that this harmony we now find between the Sage's precept and practice had commenced with his boyhood life at the Hill of Arunachala.

Sri Maharshi does not preach a complicated code of *sadhana.* The simplicity of his teaching may be explained by the fact that the Sage himself had his realisation in its pristine purity and without the prop of scholastic learning. His teachings have a strong rational appeal, evidently because his own realisation, being based entirely on his own experience, is independent of all extraneous authority. It is due to this rational appeal that we find today men of all castes and creeds, of all races and religions and from distant parts of the globe paying their homage to the venerable Sage.

Perhaps there is no instance in history where a sage, who, during his lifetime, had so influenced the thoughtful aspirants in his own country as well as in foreign lands, while he himself did not stir for more than fifty

years from the place he chose for his abode. What has appealed to me most is **the divinity and grace that radiates from the countenance of the Sage,** who has captivated the heart of the educated and illiterate, of the young and old, the prince and pauper, men, women and children, nay, even animals and birds.

31

Chinta Dikshitulu, B.A., L.T., was a distinguished Telugu author.

When you, the unseen Bhagavan, appear before me, I get perplexed, not knowing what I should do. I long to see you without a wink of the eye. I gaze at you with the deep desire to imprint Your image on my heart.

In ever so many ways and poses of beauty, in ever and ever so many ways I see You bestowing Your grace on the devotees. But, why is it, O Bhagavan that You vanish from my heart after staying but for a moment?

That beauty of Yours in the majesty of being seated, that supreme serenity and grace in Your charming gaze while You recline on the pillow, that lordship of Maheswara that marks the beauty of Your form while You are standing; that majesty, that self-awareness, that love and beauty that is expressed by your slow gait; that lion-like majesty, that mercy and condescension revealed in your glance bestowed on the devotees while You turn back and look at them – why is it, O Bhagavan! That all these charming views and Your Presence I took in through my eyes to retain them within myself, all these are slipping away, on my return home, why is it so, Bhagavan?

Do You say that if my heart is to be Your abode, it should be made fit for the purpose? Can I do it, O Bhagavan? Can't You, O Bhagavan, dispel those shades of darkness with the Light of Your Form? Won't You wipe out the impurity through Your mercy, O Bhagavan?

I recollect the verses which devotees have composed on You. I tally those descriptions with You, and with the aid of those expressions I take hold of Your Form and try to establish You in my heart. But you escape those expressions. What to do, O Bhagavan?

Live in my heart, O Bhagavan, that by itself will do for me, O Bhagavan ! Won't You, O Bhagavan, won't You?

32

Harindranath Chattopadhyaya, poet and artiste was younger brother of Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India.

The entry in Devaraja Mudaliar's* Day by Day with Bhagavan *dated June 5, 1945 refers to a remark by Prof. Subbaramayya (no.41) in the hall that he came across a copy of Chattopadhyaya's verses at Sri Aurobindo Ashram, with Sri Aurobindo's notes at the margin highly commending some verses. There upon, Chattopadhyaya told Bhagavan that while at Sri Aurobindo Ashram for two years he composed about 4,000 sonnets and a poem of 5,000 lines. He gave a recitation of two of his poems before Bhagavan and acted a piece from his play in which a dock-labourer groaning under his work bursts out into a complaint. These were greatly appreciated.

Extracts from his poems:

The Thrice Marvellous Master – Sri Ramana

Eternity has worn a human face,
Contracted to a little human span,
Lo, the Immortal has become a man,
A self-imprisoned thing in time and space.

* * *

Upon a narrow couch you see him sit,
Vision of tenderness and grace and calm;
Upon the finite compass of His Palm
He holds the secrets of the Infinite.

* * *

Thrice marvellous pure Master on the height,
Towards whom we dumbly yearn, each one apart,
Striving to hold Thy image in the heart,
O cleave our darkness with your searching light !

* * *

A Lyric to Sri Ramana

You are the light that never pales,
The beacon-light that never fails,
Nor flickers in the ruddiest gales
Blowing across life's darkened slope.

* * *

You are the comfort which endures,
The constant kindly touch that cures,
The voice that ever re-assures
The heart when it is losing hope.

* * *

You are a huge horizon bent
Over a world of discontent.
Even in storm you strike a note
Of safety while our floundering boat
Gives up all hope of reaching shore.

* * *

O human body thrice divine!
How very silently you shine
Lamp-like upon the borderline
Of all our struggle, all our strife.

* * *

Give us the high-illumined grace
To make the heart your dwelling place,
And may we evermore contain
Your presence in each passing pain.

* * *

Increase our silence and our power,
Be with us every fleeting hour.

* * *

33

Dr. K. Subrahmanian (Dr.K.S.) (1928-98), the founder of Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad, was Professor of English at the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages, Hyderabad. The following is extracted from what he wrote about himself in 1992.

My father who worked as a teacher in Municipal High School, Tiruvannamalai, met the Maharshi in 1927 and asked a question for which he was very sorry in the later years of his life: "There are so many *sadhus* wandering around, how am I to know who is a genuine one?" The Maharshi most graciously said, "He is a real *sadhu* in whose presence you get an indescribable peace without making any effort."

From 1928 to 1961 my father taught at a convent school in Kodaikanal. During this period, for seven years he was tutor to the princess of Nabha (a princely state in the Punjab), whose Maharaja was brought to Kodaikanal as a punishment by the British. The Maharaja and Maharani were deeply impressed with the life and teachings of the Maharshi, about whom my father talked to them.

In 1944, when the Maharaja was not too well, he asked my father to go and seek the blessings of Bhagavan.When my father spoke to Bhagavan about the Maharaja's condition, he listened with great attention but kept silent. The Ashram authorities gave *prasad* for the Maharaja. After opening the cover containing the *prasad,* the Maharaja told my father, "Krishnaswami, the Maharshi has intimated that I am not going to live long. You see in this envelope there is no *kumkum.* There is only *vibhuti."* The Maharaja passed away four months later.

Hearing from my father and uncle that Bhagavan used to read letters written to him by devotees, I used to write to him occasionally from the hostel of the high school at Tirukattupally, where I studied from 1941 to 1945. Once I went to Bhagavan with my uncle and was looking at him. Bhagavan asked my uncle about me. On being told that I was his nephew, he said, "So you are the person writing letters to me." This gave me a strange feeling of awe, coupled with great joy, and I said in a low voice, "Yes." Bhagavan remarked, "Does your father send money to you so that you can write these letters?" and laughed. I wasn't quite sure whether Bhagavan was being sarcastic or made the remark in a light vein. I sweated for a while, continuing to look at Bhagavan.

After completing my SSLC in 1945, I appplied for admission to American College, Madurai. On the day I was to leave for Madurai, I went to Bhagavan, prostrated to him and took leave of him. On enquiry, I told him that I was going to Madurai for admission to college. Bhagavan asked, "Which College?" I wanted to say American College but instead said Madura College. Bhagavan smiled and said, *sari* [All right]. I could not get admission to American College, but got admission in Madura College, Madurai.

In 1949, I attended the *kumbhabhishekam* of Mathrubhuteswara temple, which was an elaborate solemn affair. In the evening, after *arati* was offered to the deity in the temple, it was brought to Bhagavan. I was sitting very close to him in the hall attached to the temple. It was a moving sight when Bhagavan extended his hands and touched the *arati* with great reverence, closing his eyes.

Soon after every operation was performed on Bhagavan's arm, I used to visit him. Sometimes I cried uncontrollably looking at Bhagavan from a distance. As far as Bhagavan was concerned, he was ever the same serene, blissful self. He behaved as if the disease belonged to somebody else.

Once in 1946, when I was an 18-year old student, I was walking towards the old meditation hall with my head down, thinking of something. When I looked up, I saw Bhagavan talking to a devotee near the well, adjacent to the hall. I did not expect Bhagavan to be there. When he looked at me sideways I stood still, as I did not want to disturb him. I felt a powerful light penetrate and engulf me. The bliss that I experienced was unique. I was in that state for about 20 days.

Sometime in 1949, I sat at the entrance of the new hall, outside the Mother's temple, looking at Bhagavan. Then I thought to myself, "I have been coming to the Ashram so often, but have had no experience of real meditation. Bhagavan has not granted me this experience." Thinking along these lines, I kept looking at Bhagavan for a considerable time and then closed my eyes. I do not know how long I was in that state.When I opened my eyes I found the meditation hall empty. Bhagavan and the devotees must have gone past me as I was sitting at the entrance. When I realised that I had been sitting when Bhagavan went past me, I was horrified. But suddenly I realized that Bhagavan, out of his unbounded grace had granted me an experience whereby I was completely oblivious of my surroundings.

In August 1949, I visited the Ashram from Madras, where I was

studying. After his second operation, Bhagavan was sitting in the new hall. People were not allowed to sit inside the hall. They could enter, prostrate and leave the hall. On August 16, I planned to leave for Madras. I went to the hall, prostrated, and went close to Bhagavan to say, 'I am leaving'. Normally he would say '*sari*,' but that day he turned his face to the other side. I came out, sat outside for sometime and went in again. I prostrated and said that I was leaving. Again he turned his face to the other side. Once again I came out and sat for sometime. For the third time I entered, prostrated and said 'I was leaving', yet, again he turned his face. I was puzzled.

As I was getting late for the train, I decided to leave for the station. Hardly had I gone some distance, I felt it difficult to proceed. I came back and decided to leave only after Bhagavan's consent. When the next day I went to the hall, prostrated and said that I was leaving, to my joy and surprise, Bhagavan said, '*sari*'. Till today I do not know why Bhagavan did not give me permission to leave the previous day.

My final year examinations for B.A.(Hons.) were in March 1950. In February, T.V. Krishnaswami Iyer, my sister's father-in-law, a great devotee of Bhagavan, gave me a copy of Muruganar's commentary on *Aksharamanamalai,* which ran over one hundred pages. Deeply impressed with the manuscript, I copied it in its entirety in a few days, without worrying for the examination. I felt this was more important than the examination. The first paper, Old English, contained passages for translation from old English to modern English. I had not prepared well. The day before the examination I opened the book at random and translated the passage that I found on that page and went to sleep. In the examination hall, I was astonished to find the same passage which I had translated the previous night.

Bhagavan treated animals and birds with great affection and concern. Sometimes a couple of monkeys would walk into the meditation hall. Some devotees used to get agitated. Bhagavan would gently call the monkeys and give them cashewnuts or groundnuts. They would go away screeching with delight. Sometimes a squirrel would scramble up the couch. Bhagavan would fondle it and give it whatever was available and it would leave without disturbing anybody. Similarly, a peacock would come and get some puffed rice from his hand.

Once an Ashram deer was attacked by some animals and the wounds turned from bad to worse. Bhagavan sat near the deer, held its face in his hand, looking at its tearful eyes. The *sarvadhikari* of the Ashram asked my uncle who was standing close, to look after the deer and relieve

Bhagavan. Bhagavan heard this but did not make any response, and sat there till the deer breathed its last. There is a *samadhi* for the deer near that of the cow Lakshmi.[1]

My uncle, when young, asked Bhagavan, "Is it true that Ravana had ten heads?" Bhagavan replied, "How does it help you to know whether he had ten heads or not?"

When the Mathrubhuteswara Temple was being constructed, Bhagavan used to lift the bricks and offer them to the mason. He told my uncle, "I am helping construction work."

On one occasion a large number of people came to the Ashram unexpectedly and they had to be provided lunch. One of the cooks went to Bhagavan and said, "We are worried because there isn't enough food." Bhagavan said, "Don't worry. There will be enough." My uncle was present in the dining hall along with others. Bhagavan looked at almost every one before he started eating. My uncle said that even before eating most of the people felt full. So each one ate very little and what had been prepared was more than enough.

Viswanatha Swami (no. 57), a scholar and author of the famous* Ramana Ashtothra, *told the following to Dr. K.S.:

Once someone enquired of Bhagavan as to what he would request if Lord Siva appeared before him on His bull prompting him to ask for a boon. Bhagavan is reported to have said, "Do not try to deceive me. He has no form. I don't want to be tempted by your question. He is the formless Self in all."

When Bhagavan had blisters on his hands due to grinding chutney everyday and did not heed to the request of Viswanatha Swami not to undertake the job, Swami went to the kitchen early and did all the work Bhagavan used to do. Bhagavan asked him why he had done his work in the morning. When Swami said that he could not bear to see Bhagavan grinding chutney with blisters on his hands, Bhagavan said, "In the early days I used to go for *bhiksha*. Now I am getting free food in the Ashram. That is why I do some work or the other in the kitchen. Today you have done my work. Please give me your *dhoti*. I will wash it for you." When Swami heard this he was moved to tears.

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1. *Refer* annexure-IV, p. 414.

34

N. Balarama Reddy, M.A. (1908-95), was brought up in spiritually-oriented surroundings in a village in Andhra Pradesh. He switched over to Sri Ramana in 1937 from Sri Aurobindo ashram, where he had gone in 1931. *My Reminiscences* details his long years of spiritual life and *sadhana* at Sri Ramanasramam.

Sri Bhagavan was a being whose advent into this world would bless the earth goddess. There is a line in the *Bhagvatam* which says: "They put their feet on the earth and the earth feels blessed." To my mind, Bhagavan was one of the most glorious beings that have ever visited this earth. **The more you live with him, the more you feel that you had done something in the past, something great which entitled you to deserve association with Bhagavan. Being with him is being elevated.** You need not talk with him; you need not try to learn from him through speech. He was pouring out his grace like the rays of the sun – no stopping ever. Even now he will answer your call provided you are sincere – utterly sincere.

It is hard to describe and a wonder to see how Bhagavan bound all with his love. Words would never pass between Bhagavan and his long-standing devotees. Nevertheless, these devotees – whether men, women or children – knew that Bhagavan's love and grace were being showered on them. By a single glance, a nod of the head, or perhaps by a simple enquiry from Bhagavan, sometimes not even directly but through a second person – the devotee knew that he was Bhagavan's very own and that he cared for him. In his presence all distinctions and differences were resolved.

Bhagavan was the most considerate and kind-hearted. Even if he appeared indifferent to onlookers, he still took a keen interest in the progress of the seekers. I was helped many times by Bhagavan. For instance, due to a crisis in my family, I was informed that my continuous presence in the village was required. It meant I would have to leave Bhagavan for good.

When I received the news I went and explained it to Bhagavan who listened and then simply nodded his head. I understood the meaning of this nod only upon receiving a letter from my mother, who wrote that I need not leave the presence of Bhagavan and that she would attend to all the affairs in the village. This was a turning point in my worldly life and it was due, no doubt, to the direct intervention of Bhagavan's grace.

In the first year of my settling down in Tiruvannamalai [where he had shifted for good in 1937], I was sitting in the hall and Bhagavan was explaining a particular spiritual point to me. During the discussions he asked me to bring a book from the almirah in the hall. Not finding the book, I returned to Bhagavan and sat down again facing him. Then Bhagavan slowly and majestically walked over to the almirah and immediately pulled out the book he had asked me to find. He closed the almirah and, to my surprise, instead of walking back to the couch, came and sat on the floor right next to me.

He opened the book and holding it before my face, asked me to read the particular passage. Bhagavan's attendants used to tell me that his body was like a furnace. Only then, when he sat so close to me, did I understand what they meant. I felt spiritual power emanating from his body like an electric dynamo. I was thrilled to the core of my being.

In Bhagavan we found a being that was so surcharged with Reality that coming into his presence would effect a dynamic change in us. The Divine Power of his presence was something remarkable, entirely outstanding.

I always felt there was something tangibly distinct in Bhagavan's hall. **When we walked into the hall and sat down, we immediately felt that we had entered a different plane of existence. It was as if the world we knew did not exist – Bhagavan's presence, his other-worldliness, would envelop the atmosphere. When we walked out of the hall we were again confronted with the old world we knew all too well.**

Usually, we could not tell if Bhagavan was asleep or awake, though in reality he was always awake – awake to the Self. How he managed to remain in that unbroken state of universal awareness and still functioned in a limited, physical form remains a mystery. We cannot understand that state. In spite of his exalted state, he interacted with us at our level. He took considerable interest in the functioning of the Ashram and the accommodation of visitors.

His actions were spontaneous and natural, and by watching him we learnt how to live in the world. His example was the greatest teaching, and his divine presence far outweighted a lifetime of strenuous *sadhana.* **Just to think of him or sit in his presence used to raise us to higher levels of blessedness.**

He understood human frailty and was determined to teach us how to transcend it, not dwell upon it.

Bhagavan's whole life was simply an offering to the world. Everything he did was for others only. He wanted to liberate us from the mistaken belief that we are this body, mind and ego. For this he gave the method of Self-enquiry and showed us how to practise it. He effectively aided seekers by his powerful presence and grace.

One day, when he was still convalescing in the Ashram dispensary, I stood at his bedside and simply rested my eyes on him. No words passed between us, but I can never forget those cool, compassionate eyes that opened and bathed me in peace and love. This small event may seem insignificant to the onlooker. Yet, by that one look, soaked with immeasurable peace and grace, I felt complete security and confidence that his blessings would always be with me. Even now, more than forty years after he left his body, I feel that the same grace is flowing, enveloping and guiding me. How can it be described in words?

Once the private secretary to the Governor of Pondicherry came to the Ashram with a long list of questions written in an elaborate, complex style of French. Handing over the paper to Bhagavan, he sat on the window sill opposite the couch. Finding the questions in French, Bhagavan asked me to translate them.[1]

As I was struggling with word-by-word translation and was finding the French difficult to translate, Bhagavan said, "That's not necessary, just tell me the gist." I scanned the questions and told Bhagavan that he really didn't want oral answers but rather in the form of an experience.

Bhagavan paused for a moment, and then slowly turned his face in the direction of the questioner and rested eyes on him. After about 30 seconds, I noticed the man's body trembling and shaking all over. Then he blurted out, "Oh no, Bhagavan, not now! Please, Bhagavan, not now!" I was standing at the side of Bhagavan, watching this extraordinary scene and wondering what a being this Bhagavan was. He was a storehouse of power, yet so kind, gentle and compassionate.

In early 1950, Sitarama Reddy, a minister in Madras government arrived at the Ashram. I was asked by the management to take him to Bhagavan in the Nirvana Room. When we walked into Bhagavan's presence I noticed a peculiar radiance or a strange kind of soft splendour, pervading the room. I thought I was seeing this because of my devotion to Bhagavan. As soon as we came out of the room the minister turned to me and asked, "What was that radiance, pervading the Maharshi's room?" When he said this without any probing from me, I remembered Ganapati Muni's [no.91] second verse from *Chatvarimsat* – "Who is the repository

of all the highest virtues, whose beatific effulgence is hidden by the sheath of the gross body, like the blazing sun hidden behind the clouds."

Many incidents in my life have instilled faith in the guiding presence of the Maharshi. I also felt assured that surrendering to him as my Guru was the best decision I had ever made.

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1. Before coming to stay at Sri Ramanasramam, Balarama Reddy was for many years at Sri Aurobindo's ashram in the French territory of Pondicherry, and had acquired a working knowledge of French.

35

A. Devaraja Mudaliar, a lawyer, used to address Sri Ramana as 'my father and mother' and sign as Ramana's child – Ramana *Sei*. He authored the famous *Day by Day with Bhagavan* and *My Recollections of Bhagavan Sri Ramana*.

From about 1936, I used to go to Bhagavan regularly, once almost every month, and stay at the Ashram for three to five days each time. In 1937, I had a remarkable proof of Bhagavan's grace – my office (i.e., the Official Receiver's Office, Chittoor) was audited, and as a result of a stupid mistake of my clerk there was a deficit of Rs.70 in the cash balance. I paid the amount as soon as I was told it was missing. If the authorities had taken a strict legal view they could have called the mistake temporary misappropriation. I was terribly upset because I always had a great name for integrity and was afraid it would be damaged. That night Bhagavan appeared in my dream as a young Brahmin, very handsome and valiant in appearance, and easily, without any effort, picked up a big snake that was approaching me and put it aside. The audit report did not cause me any harm and my explanation of its being the clerk's mistake was accepted without any further remark.

I gave up my legal practice in 1939 and decided to live in the Ashram, where I was allowed to build a one-room cottage. Such permission was rarely given, and had been given only to Major Chadwick [No.42] and Yogi Ramaiah.

One day, a piece of grit got into my eye. Dr. G. S. Melkote, a devotee from Hyderabad, examined the eye and said that the grit had got fixed and he would have to take me to the hospital at Tiruvannamalai, and if that failed, to Madras, or the eye would be permanently damaged.

I was thoroughly upset and was telling Bhagavan mentally, "I came here to have a quiet time and enjoy the peace and happiness of your company. Is it your will that all this should happen?" Then I told Dr. Melkote, "Let me put a drop of castor oil and see if the lubrication will discharge the grit." He agreed. We went to Bhagavan's hall. I prostrated before him, without telling him anything. Then I took a little castor oil from Bhagavan's attendant and left for my room along with the doctor. By the time we reached the corner, I felt a distinct relief. When we got to the room he examined the eye and found nothing there. He then said, "I cannot explain how the grit disappeared. It is clearly the work of your Bhagavan."

After a stay of one or two days at the Ashram I found that the food there did not suit me. This apart, I generally took a very small quantity of rice. Once Bhagavan observing my leaf-plate, asked, "How do you manage with so little food?" I replied, "Even when I take so little my stomach gives trouble after one or two days. I cannot properly digest even this quantity." Bhagavan kept quiet, but thereafter I had no more trouble with my stomach even when I stayed continuously in the Ashram and took all the meals.

Because of the poor health of my daughter and of the interval of about ten years since her previous confinement, I was extremely anxious about her delivery. The medical assistance available at her husband's place was minimal. I communicated all this anxiety to Bhagavan through a letter. I got a reply from the Ashram that I need not be anxious and that my daughter would have a safe delivery.[1] This was not the sort of reply that was usually sent from the Ashram. What was usual was something like the following: 'We hope that by Bhagavan's Grace the confinement will be safe.' I came back to the Ashram telling my son-in-law that I would be of no particular use there and to wire me if there was need. After I had been with Bhagavan for two or three days, I got a letter from my son-in-law stating that my daughter's delivery was safe and smooth.

About the end of 1946, I got a call from my brother to help him in a certain case between him and another close relation of ours in a court at Madras. I earnestly prayed to Bhagavan that the case should end without any trial. I wrote to Bhagavan that it was humiliating for me when close relations have proceedings in the court and our domestic concerns get exposed. I was mentally very anxious that the case should not come up for trial. But both parties were stubborn and cantankerous and a compromise was very improbable. Still Bhagavan's grace did not fail; the case ended without any trial, but on account of a circumstance which I could never

have dreamt of : the party who had complained against my brother and his advocate were both absent when the case was called, and so the complaint was dismissed.

A whole volume could be written describing how Bhagavan practised *samatva* (equality) and taught us constantly by his example. In his presence all were alike, high or low, rich or poor, man or woman, child or adult, human or animal. Just as he himself treated all alike, he would never tolerate any special consideration or attention being shown to him more than to any other in the Ashram.

Many a time it happened that if he observed even a little excess in what was served to him of any dish or any delicacy above the quantity served to others, he would flare up with indignation and rebuke whoever was responsible. He used to say, "By doing such a thing you are disgracing me. There cannot be a greater disgrace than this."[2]

Once a visiting European lady was sitting opposite to Bhagavan in the hall. Being unaccustomed to squatting on the floor with legs crossed, she stretched out her legs in front. One of the attendants considered this disrespectful to Bhagavan and asked her to fold her legs. The poor lady felt that whereas she came to show respect she had done something disrespectful, and I had the impression that she almost wept with chagrin. Bhagavan who reads the hearts and not acts, felt unhappy for the distress caused to the lady. He told her there was no harm in sitting as was most comfortable to her, however she could not be persuaded again to do so.

Bhagavan himself was stretching out his legs on the couch, since the rheumatism in his knees had made it painful to sit cross-legged for more than a short time. However, he now sat up cross-legged and could not be persuaded to relax again the whole day. He said, "If it is a rule for her, it is a rule for all. I too should not stretch out my legs." However much we begged Bhagavan not to take notice of a foolish act on the part of an attendant, he could not be dissuaded at all. It was only the next day that we succeeded in getting him to stretch out his legs as usual whenever he felt like it.

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1. Sri Ramana never wrote any letter or signed any paper. The letters addressed to him were read out to him and the replies were sent by the Ashram office as desired by him.
2. *Refer* reminiscences of the cooks at the Ashram at p.190, last para; and p.195, paras 1-3.

36

Maurice Frydman (1900-76), a Polish Jew, was working as a research engineer in France when the then Diwan of Mysore, struck by his originality and drive, brought him to Mysore. He effected improvements in the *charkha*[1] and earned the name 'Bharatananda' from Mahatma Gandhi in recognition of his intense love for India. He first met Sri Ramana around 1935.

Just six months after I came to India, I was left alone and had no friends. The person whom I loved died and I had nothing to attract me in life. Quite accidentally, just for fun, I dropped in at Tiruvannamalai. I went direct to the Swami and remained there for two hours. Then I understood that I had met someone, the like of whom I had never met before. I did not then know what was meant by words like the Maharshi and Bhagavan. I had no preconceived ideas and yet I felt that there was something extraordinary in that man. I was told about his teachings but they were far too high for me. I did not understand what they meant but I felt a strong affection for him, just as a dog would have towards his master.

Afterwards, whenever I felt worried, I used to go to the Ashram, and sit in his presence. In the early days I would be asking questions, but later when I began to visit him more and more, discussions with him grew less and less. Then I began to visit him almost every month. I knew no *sadhana* or *dhyana*. I would simply sit in his presence. To my questions, the Maharshi would say, "Find out who you are." I could not make out anything, but all the same I felt happy. Slowly, some change came in me.

Just as the egg grows and hatches only with the aid of the warmth of the mother, I was getting into shape slowly and steadily in his presence. My mind became quieter than before. Previously it was unhappy and dissatisfied, now a kind of security and peace began to be felt spontaneously. I felt that the Maharshi was coming nearer and nearer as time passed. Afterwards I used to think of him whenever I felt unhappy. His affection was always there and as fire melts ice so his affection made my worries melt and my struggle for life got transformed into a blissful life.

It was the immense privilege of the writer to meet a few gigantic spiritual men, but nobody ever produced on him a deeper impression than Ramana Maharshi. In him the sublime majesty of the divine life stood and moved in all simplicity. The ultimate had

revealed itself as the immediate, and the undreamt had become the actual.

The burning regret, which many probably share with me, is that full advantage was not taken of those happy and precious days when he was with us physically also – eating, talking, laughing, welcoming all, open to all. The reality was there – in abundance for taking, but we enclosed ourselves in timidity, in false humility, in self-deception and false excuses. We took a cupful when the ocean was at our feet.

In one of his letters to Sri Ramanasramam Frydman wrote:

"The Maharshi is with me not only when I think of him but also when I am not thinking of him. Otherwise, how do I live?" [2]

A.R. Natarajan records in his book **Timeless in Time:**

Frydman was childlike in nature and would put frank questions with freedom. Once he asked with dramatic gestures, "Why should not the ego be cut down with one stroke and destroyed so as to give supreme bliss to the devotees?" Then Sri Ramana broke out into laughter and asked Frydman to hold out his ego so that he could strike it down. Everyone including Frydman joined in the laugher. "Yes, now I understand", said Frydman.

S.Bhanu Sharma writes in **Ramana Smrti:**

In 1935, I happened to work in Bangalore under a Polish engineer, Maurice Frydman, who was a frequent visitor to the Ashram. In 1937, one of his Dutch friends Dr.G.H.Mees [No.2], a scholar, told him that he was not able to get clarification on certain points on Indian philosophy, despite all efforts. Frydman suggested to him to go to Tiruvannamalai and meet Sri Bhagavan, and I was to accompany him in the mission. Dr.Mees noted down all his questions. We arrived at about 8.30 a.m. and sat down in the hall in front of Bhagavan. Several devotees were putting questions and Bhagavan was answering them. Dr.Mees kept silent. At 10.45 a.m. I reminded him about his questions. He said that he no longer had any doubt on any of his points.

G.V. Subbaramayya records in his book **Sri Ramana Reminiscences:**

Many Western visitors came for the *jayanti* celebrations of 1936. One of them, Maurice Frydman, a Polish Jew of subtle intellect, plied Bhagavan with ingenious pleas for practical guidance for self-realisation. Bhagavan followed his arguments with keen interest but kept silent all the

time. When pressed to say something, Bhagavan quoted from the Bible, "Be still and know that I am God", and added a rider that the Lord said, "'*know*' and not '*think*' that I am God."

Extracts from Frydman's poems:

I am at the end of the tether and can't break the cord
All my going ahead is a deceitful dream,
All my thinking not true, all my feeling not pure,
All my doing not right, all my living not clear.
I am tied to myself by myself through myself,
The knot out of reach, I am in your hands.
There is a Heart and a mind, and a body and soul
Waiting for you. You will come when you choose,
And whatever you like you are welcome to do.

* * *

Heavy with the mud of many lands I was flowing lazily,
Making obstacles of myself out of my unholy accumulations.
Suddenly I awakened to the freshness of endless beauty,
And felt the eternal environment of endless peace.
My beloved I have found you, and yet never were we separated,
Every drop of my being is you and yours is the force of my flow,
Never are we apart and yet I always strive after you.
The flow of creation will go on with me or without me,
Only do not make me forget that I am none and that you only exist and create in ever-changing mobility.

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1. Reference here is to the spinning wheel used by Mahatma Gandhi, and at his instance by millions of others in India to counter the use of imported cloth.
2. Entry no.74, *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi,* Sri Ramanasramam.

37

S. (Suleman) S. (Samuel) Cohen, an Iraqi Jew, was a qualified accountant. He came to India in 1927 in search of the key to the mystery of life. He worked in Bombay for a few years before joining the Theosophical Society at Madras, where he heard of the Maharshi and read some of his books. This worked as magic and he adopted Sri Ramanasramam as his home in 1936. He died in 1980, and lies buried in the Ashram campus. He is the author of *Guru Ramana, Reflections on Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi* and *Residual Reminiscences of Ramana.*

It was then the Ashram's custom to honour the newcomer by giving him his first meal in a line directly opposite the Maharshi's seat. After food, someone announced that the Maharshi was coming to the hall. I rushed there. Behind me calmly walked in the tall, impressive figure of the Maharshi with leisurely though firm steps. I was alone in the hall with him. **Joy and peace suffused my being, never before had I such a delightful feeling of purity and well-being at the mere proximity of a man.** After a while, I saw him looking at me with large penetrating eyes, rendered divinely soothing by their child-like innocence. **I became absorbed in the entrancing personality of this magnificent human magnet – Sri Ramana Bhagavan.** It is needless to say that from that day Sri Ramanasramam became my permanent home.

A few days after my arrival, I sat in the hall almost alone after the Maharshi's return from breakfast. He saw a leather-bound book by my side and asked me, "What book is that?" taking it, I guessed, for a scriptural manual. I answered that it was a notebook. He chuckled and said to the interpreter: "*Vellai karan* (the white man) does not move about without a notebook." This opening encouraged me to broach the subject of sex. I said, "Last night Mr.Brunton and myself had a heated discussion on the question of sex and marriage, especially as it affects the spiritual life. What does the Maharshi think about it?"The Maharshi kept silent for a moment and remarked, "As far as *sadhana* is concerned, *brahmacharya* means dwelling in *Brahman,*" leaving me to take it as I willed.

I constructed a hut for my residence near the Ashram in March 1936. I hardly stayed in it in the daytime: my mind was wholly fixed on the Master. So I spent my days and a part of my nights in the hall, where the

Maharshi lived and slept. There I quietly sat and listened to the visitors' talks with him and to his answers, which were sometimes translated into English, particularly if the questioner was a foreigner or a North Indian. His answers were fresh and sweet. His influence was all-pervasive in his silence not less than in his speech.

To the serious-minded, Bhagavan was a beacon light in an otherwise impenetrable darkness, and a haven of peace.

Bhagavan was the most liberal of gurus. At no time did he consider the need to frame rules and regulations to control the lives of his disciples; nor did he believe in a common, enforced discipline, for he himself had attained the highest without them. He left his disciples completely free to mould their lives as best as they could. This physical freedom considerably helped me to tide over the first few difficult months of my new existence.

The years 1936-38 were very blissful indeed. We could gather around Bhagavan's couch, speak to him intimately as to a beloved father, tell him our troubles without let or hindrance. Bhagavan related to us stories yielding to transportation of emotions when he depicted a scene of great *bhakti*, or great human tragedies to which he was sensitive to the extreme. Then he shed tears, which he vainly attempted to conceal.

Some stories are memorable like that of Kabir[1] who had *siddhis* yet he earned his livelihood by weaving, which was his profession. One day, when Kabir was working on his loom, a disciple entered in great excitement and said, "Sir, there is a juggler outside who is attracting large crowds by making his stick stand in the air." Thereupon Kabir, who like all true saints, discouraged the display of jugglery, wanting to shame the man, rushed out with a big ball of thread in his hand and threw it in the air. The ball went up and up unwinding till the whole thread stood stiff in mid air. The people including the juggler were stunned in amazement, and Bhagavan's eyes acted the amazement, while his hand stood high above his head in the position that of Kabir when he threw up the ball.

On another occasion, Bhagavan recited from memory a poem of a Vaishnava saint, in which occurred the words 'Fold me in thy embrace, O Lord', when the arms of Bhagavan joined in a circle round the vacant air before him, his eyes shone with devotional ardour, while his voice shook with stifled sobs which did not escape our notice. It was fascinating to see him acting the parts he related, and be in such exhilarated moods as these.

The notion that the guru always watched his disciples continued lurking in my mind. But as I discovered later, Bhagavan was doing nothing of the kind. **He was Supreme Detachment incarnate.** The strict

aloofness which appeared to me at first as sheer callousness on the part of the Maharshi, turned out across the years to be more potent in its action to purify, guide, reform and mature the disciples' consciousness than the guru's conscious interference. Without this detachment, the guru is bound to grow partial and discriminative.

Renunciation and surrender is the cornerstone of *sadhana*, and with the Maharshi it was the 'completest.' There were a number of deluded deovtees who tried to ingratiate themselves with him, but Bhagavan never deviated from the neutrality in his spiritual attitude towards them. Answering spiritual questions he always did, but he never attempted consciously to give Self-realisation to any in all the 14 years of my contact with him, either by touch or mental projection or any other means.

Early mornings I went alone for *Giri pradakshina* – an eight-mile trek around Arunachala hill, which took me almost three hours to accomplish. This had its own special benefis. At that early hour I generally was in a walking meditation mood, particularly as I expressly made a habit of it. Another factor to a successful *pradakshina* and, to me, the greatest, was the determination at the very start not to retrospect – not to look back upon the past – throughout the walk. I would never allow memory to ruin my calmness. Each time I caught memory sneaking in, I immediately brought my attention to the rhythm of my footfalls till the mind regained its restful state. The partial fatigue experienced in the latter half of the journey automatically induced this mental rest without much effort.

Speaking of retrospection, *sadhakas* must be warned against the tricks of memory. It cannot be too often recommended to them to forbear looking into the past with its trials and errors, acts of omission and commission, regrets, fears, passion, love and hatred, personal tragedies etc. Everything is dust, everything transitory, including the seemingly indissoluble human ties, more so wealth and fame, are thus not worth a moment's regret. Nothing is changeless and lasting but the natural state of Pure Being.

Three years rolled by. The Master used to pass by my hut almost everyday. Often he took shelter from the midday sun on my verandah for two or three minutes, during which I made myself scarce, in order not to inconvenience him, till one day I foolishly placed a chair for his use on the sly, which made him once and for all boycott the verandah. Despite his full knowledge of our adoration for him, he was extremely sensitive to the slightest trouble which might ensue from him to us, or, for that matter, to any one: thus placing a chair for him, or expecting him everyday at a fixed hour, he interpreted as interfering with my rest, hence the boycott.[2]

After three years' stay at the Ashram, I got Bhagavan's permission to go on a *yatra* to the South. He smiled approval and enquired about the date and time of my starting, and whether I had made arrangements for my stay in the various places of my visit. Extremely touched by his solicitude, I answered that I was going as a *sadhu,* trusting to chance for accommodation.

During my leisurely tour in south India, I visited temples and stayed in holy places for long or short durations, as the spiritual mood took me. Everywhere I was well received. Wherever I went Bhagavan's name acted like a charm, particularly as I had adopted the Indian dress from the beginning (1936), lived in Brahmin streets, and ate Brahmin food. I even for the time discarded the wearing of footwear, bathed in Hindu bathing tanks and attended evening temple worship with the smearings on my arms and forehead.

During my *yatra* I used to plunge in reflections on Bhagavan's blissful silence and calm repose. The stillness of his mind haunted me wherever I went. I felt his influence in the depth of my soul and I cried: "O Bhagavan, how mighty you are and how sublime and all-pervasive is the immaculate purity of your mind! With what tender emotions do we, your disciples, think of your incomparable qualities, your gentleness; your serene, adorable countenance; your cool, refreshing smiles; the sweetness of the words that come out of your mouth; the radiance of your all embracing love; your equal vision towards one and all, even towards stray animals!"

The influence of the Maharshi on genuine seekers, who leave the world behind and turn pilgrims on the path of the Absolute, is indeed great; for such aspirants touch a sympathetic chord in his soul, evoking spiritual responses of great magnitude. A close friend of mine once related to me his experience when a brief talk with the Master made him stop his fruitless pursuit of the occult and take to the path of knowledge (*jnana).* In the words of my friend:

"I was convinced that the Maharshi spoke from direct, valid experience and I made up my mind to speak alone with him, before the hall got filled with devotees. It was eight in the morning. Bhagavan had just entered and had hardly settled in his usual place, when I drew near his sofa and squatted on the bare floor. Nothing, I knew, gave greater pleasure to the Maharshi than to listen attentively to his devotees' spiritual difficulties and give his advice. This knowledge encouraged me to explain to him slowly and briefly in clear, simple English the agitations of my mind. After I finished,

he remained pensive for a few seconds and then, in the same language but with considerable deliberation, said, 'Yes, you are right; all preconceptions must go, practice alone will show you where the truth lies.' Apart from the words which he uttered, I was suddenly gripped by an overwhelming urge to surrender unreservedly to him to guide me in my spiritual hunger. My fate and all that I was, passed from that moment into the sacred hands of Bhagavan forever."

The constant influx of visitors was of some help in that it afforded the much-needed relaxation to an otherwise tense life. Secondly, the peculiar problems which visitors brought with them were a useful study – study of the human mind and the endless ills to which it is subjected. The problems of the mind and conditions which give rise to them are infinitely more numerous than the variety which the physical universe presents to the human sense. Moreover, watching the masterly way Bhagavan tackled these problems was *sadhana* in itself. Rationality was the very essence of his arguments whilst the ultimate answer to all the questions was always the same, namely, 'Find out who you are'. He first met every questioner on his own ground, and then slowly steered him round to the source of all problems – the Self – the realisation of which he held to be the universal panacea.

Psychologists deal only with the working of the mind, but Bhagavan goes to the source, the Self itself. **It was a wonder that all visitors were agreeably impressed by him, sometimes even without comprehending the drift of his ideas.**

People take *siddhis* as the sure sign of Perfection, but few understand the subtle influence of the truly Perfect person, who without the deliberate use of miracles, works out the transformation of the people who come into contact with him, more so the genuine disciples, whom he actually turns into *muktas,* or well on the way of *mukti,* something which external *siddhis* are totally incapable of.

Many of those who have had the inestimable privilege of a long stay with Bhagavan bear witness to the blessedness which his mere presence conferred upon them.

The following brief extracts are from Cohen's notes of Bhagavan's replies to questions in the 1930s and 40s. He says: Bhagavan always spoke in Tamil, except when the questions were put in Telugu or Malayalam, which he answered in the same language. The visitors who knew none of these languages received answers through an

interpreter in English.Although the Maharshi could read and understand English well, he did not prefer to speak it.

The Real is ever-present, like the screen on which the cinematographic pictures move. While the picture appears on it, the screen remains invisible. Stop the picture and the screen will become clear. All thoughts and events are merely pictures moving on the screen of Pure Consciousness, which alone is real.

In a cinema-show you can see pictures only in a very dim light or in darkness. When all lights are switched on, pictures disappear. So also in the floodlight of the Supreme *atman* all objects disappear.

Think of God, attachments will gradually drop away. If you wait till all desires disappear before starting your devotion and prayer, you will have to wait for a very long time indeed.

It is every intelligent man's experience that evil doing recoils on the doer sooner or later. 'Love thy neighbour as thyself ' means that you should love him, because he is your Self.

That which comes and goes, rises and sets, is born and dies is the ego. That which always abides, never changes and is devoid of qualities is the Self.

Pain and pleasure are to the ego, which is itself imagined. When the ego disappears through a constant enquiry into its nature, the illusion of pleasure and pain also disappears, and the Self alone remains.

Habits create the false notion that thinking is a permanent institution, with which it is impossible to dispense, but enquiry and discrimination will blast this fallacy. None succeeds without effort and the successful few owe their victory to perseverance.

We are so accustomed to objectivity that we have lost the knowledge of ourself simply because the Self cannot be objectified. We are the Self, yet we ask how to know the Self.

I have never said that there is no need for a guru. All depends on what you call guru. He need not be in a human form. Dattatreya had 24 gurus. The Upanishads say that none but a guru can take a man out of the jungle of intellect and sense perceptions. Did I not sing hymns to Arunachala? Guru is God or the Self. First a man prays to God to fulfill his desires. A time comes when he will no more pray for the fulfilment of material desires but for God itself. God then appears to him in some form or other, human or non-human, to guide him to Himself in answer to his prayer and according to his needs.

Meditation includes mind control, the subtle watchfulness against intruding thoughts. In the beginning, efforts for control are greater than for actual meditation, but in due course, meditation wins and becomes effortless.

Heart is the seat of *jnanam*. It is represented in the physical body by a hole smaller than the smallest pinpoint, which is always shut. When the mind drops down in *kevala-nirvikalpa*[3] it opens but shuts again after it. When *sahaja*[4] is attained it opens for good. The former is like the mental bucket under the water, which can be pulled out any moment. The latter is like the river that has linked up with the ocean from which there is no return.

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1. A great saint and top-ranking Hindi poet of 14th century who lived in Benaras.
2. Major A.W. Chadwick writes: In the early days of my stay (1935-36), I was living in a big room adjoining the Ashram storeroom. Here Bhagavan often used to visit me. On coming into my room unexpectedly he would tell me not to disturb myself but to go on with whatever I was occupied at the time. I would remain seated, carrying on with whatever I was doing at the time. I realize now that this was looked upon as terrible disrespect by the Indian devotees, but it had its reward. If one put oneself out for Bhagavan or appeared in any way disturbed he just would not come in future; he would disturb no body, so considerate was he. But if one carried on with what one was doing then he would himself take a seat and talk quite naturally without the formality, which usually surrounded him in the hall. I had no idea how lucky I was and how privileged, but certainly appreciated the visits. *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi,* p.23.
3. A high-level state of *samadhi*.
4. The highest level of *samadhi*.

38

K.K. Nambiar was Chief Engineer, Highways, Madras Presidency. *The Guiding Presence of Sri Ramana* contains his reminiscences.

In 1932, when I was an engineer at Salem, a friend of mine left with me the booklet '*Who am I?*' in Malayalam. There was a mention of a 'living Maharshi' in the book. I had heard of the Maharshis in *puranas* and doubted there could be one in flesh and blood living these days. A few days later, when I mentioned about the booklet to Chettiar, President of the Salem District Board, he confirmed the existence of the Maharshi, and a trip was arranged to Tiruvannamalai.

We went to Sri Ramanasramam. On entering the hall I prostrated before the Maharshi. **Though no words passed between us, I felt an indescribable influence and a sense of calmness settling over me. I sat transfixed to the spot.** Chettiar got up after about an hour and signalled that it was time to go. We took leave of Bhagavan who nodded assent.

While leaving the Ashram, **I felt that my heart was being irresistibly attracted, as though by a mighty spiritual magnet towards that Divinity in human form seated on the couch.** My feeling at that time can be best expressed in the words of poet Kalidasa: "The body goes forward, but the restless heart runs backward like the cloth of a banner which is being carried against the wind." I prayed fervently that I might be granted more opportunities to be with him. My prayer was answered. I was posted as District Board Engineer of North Arcot with headquarters at Tiruvannamalai.

During one of my trips to the Ashram, I made a contribution toward a *bhiksha*.This meant feeding all Ashramites and visitors sumptuously. Bhagavan also partook of the meal along with others. People started queuing into the dining hall and I chanced to sit right in front of Bhagavan, who gave me a gracious smile. I can still recall the ecstasy I felt while taking meal right in front of Bhagavan, less than a yard separating our leaf-plates. That was the happiest meal in my life.

By now my scepticism about a living Maharshi had vanished like mist before the rising sun. My attitude towards work and play was undergoing a beneficial change. I gave up shikar, vowing that I would not kill any animal. The sudden change came when I shot a spotted deer and brought it to the travellers' bungalow of Hoganekal forest. In the adjacent suite a swami was staying. Seeing the carcass, he spoke to me in a voice choked with emotion, "Look at the eyes of the deer. How pathetic! Do not kill such innocent creatures." I took this intervention as an instruction from Bhagavan himself.

By 1936, I had picked up courage to talk to Bhagavan now and then. One of the first things I did was to place on record my complete surrender to him, looking up to him as my sole protector and refuge. I wrote a Sanskrit *sloka* on a piece of paper and after prostrating as usual, placed the slip near his feet. The *sloka* meant: "I have no other refuge; you are my only support Oh Ramaneshwara! Therefore have mercy on me and protect me." Bhagavan read it and gave it back commenting upon the parody I had made of the well-known *sloka*. When I resumed my seat, Bhagavan was steadily looking at me. The gracious look directed at me set my mind completely at rest.

Not a day passed at the Ashram without some incident or other depicting the mysterious ways in which Bhagavan was consoling and comforting his devotees, clearing their doubts, imparting knowledge and generally aiding them towards the goal of Self-realisation. Needless to say, my faith in Bhagavan got intensified day by day. I looked up to him as God in human form and surrendered all my cares to him. Gradually I lost interest in visits to temples and allied rituals. More time was spent in meditation while at the Ashram and also at home, when not preoccupied with other pressing domestic or official matters.

One day, while sitting with eyes closed in meditation in the Hall I had a sensation of numbness creeping all over my body and I saw my own skeleton as in an x-ray picture. I spoke to Bhagavan about this. He said that I should not give any attention to such things, but should intensely continue the meditation without getting distracted.

During one of my visits, the Ashram authorities asked me to keep company with Grant Duff [No. 7], nephew of a former Governor of Madras, a philosopher and diplomat of high rank. He was sitting alone on a chair outside Matrubhuteswara Samadhi shed. When I introduced myself as an engineer in Government service, he congratulated me on having an opportunity to be in Bhagavan's presence frequently. He said that people in this part of India and those born in this century were indeed lucky to be able to meet Bhagavan – Divinity in human form. He said that he had made a thorough comparative study of religions and had come to the conclusion that the philosophy of Bhagavan alone could stand scrutiny in the modern scientific age. In fact this was the thesis of his paper for the International Philosophical Congress.

One day, some devotees were discussing the lure of *siddhis* (supernatural powers) to a *sadhaka.* I asked Bhagavan, "Nowadays people are so materialistically minded that they do not believe in any phenomenon that cannot be explained in the light of scientific knowledge. The non-believers could be easily converted and turned towards the spiritual path if those possessing psychic powers exhibit some supernatural phenomenon before their eyes. The miracles performed by Christ form the backbone of the Christian faith. Why not modern saints do miracles likewise for the salvation of mankind?" Bhagavan replied by putting a counter question, "Did those saints of yore, referred to as having performed miracles, know and act as though they were performing those miracles?"

Although Bhagavan was averse to the use and exhibition of any mystical powers and had several times warned the devotees that craving

for or indulging in them will sidetrack them from their goal of Self-realisation, miracles of some kind or other did happen at the Ashram or elsewhere. When such things were pointed out to Bhagavan, his reply in general was that such things happen due to Automatic Divine Action. I myself have been a part of one such incident, which is as follows:

In 1944, I with my family went to Tiruvannamalai for Bhagavan's *darshan* and stayed with my friend, who was a Sub-divisional Magistrate. When I was talking about my faith in Bhagavan and how he looks after his devotees, my friend said, "Let us see about your journey back to Madras. Getting accommodation in the connecting train at Villupuram is always a gamble." I said I had no worry, as Bhagavan would take good care of us. At this he interjected, "Let us have a bet on this." We alighted at Villupuram and waited for the connecting train. When the train arrived, I went past all the upper class compartments, but could find only two berths for my family of five. I was all the while praying to Bhagavan. Musing to myself, I felt like walking up to the front end of the train and found a first class bogie, completely shuttered, being towed to Madras. I ran back along the platform and spoke to the Ticket Examiner. When the railway official opened the bogie, we found a compartment with all the six seats at our disposal. I repeated 'Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya'. Later, my friend did acknowledge that he lost the bet.

I helped the Ashram for procuring materials for construction purposes, and also paper etc. for the bookshop. Bhagavan was aware of and was watching the details of the construction work at the Ashram. For example, once he asked me why I had arranged for a barrel of asphalt for expansion joints. He also kept a watch on my official career and the nature of the work I had to do. When I was recalled to the P.W.D. Highway Department as Superintending Engineer, on the retirement of the then European incumbent, Bhagavan asked whether I would be a loser in terms of my emoluments. I replied that there could not be any reduction as per rules. But despite all rules, I suffered reduction in my salary till I was promoted as Chief Engineer.

On April 2, 1950, I dreamt Bhagavan lying on the bed in the *nirvana* room talking to two persons. He could see me standing outside and told those persons, "Nambiar is waiting outside, call him in." On my entering the room, Bhagavan got down from the bed and leaning on a walking stick, walked outside followed by three of us. He took us to a spot parallel to the Matrubhuteswara Shrine and drew a rectangle on the ground with his walking stick, as though to indicate the place of his *samadhi.*

After Bhagavan's *mahanirvana* on the night of April 14, a large number of persons led by the *sarvadhikari* protested vehemently against the idea of locating Bhagavan's *samadhi* as a subsidiary to the Mother's shrine. They wanted a bigger shrine for Bhagavan. The *sarvadhikari* told me, "You please keep these dreams and visions to yourself." Only after much argument and under heavy pressure he had to give up.[1]

People who visited Bhagavan during his lifetime could not have failed to observe the characteristic pose in which he reclined on the sofa with eyes closed and his head supported with his left arm, particularly at the time of Veda *parayana.* Some of us devotees sitting around used to watch him intently during such periods.

On several occasions I used to pray mentally to him that on opening his eyes, he should bestow a look at me and I must say I was never disappointed. So, it was crystal clear to me that prayers to Bhagavan need not be vocal, and he felt, knew and answered the inner prayer of all his devotees.

There were also occasions when I sat at the feet of Bhagavan and intently meditated on his form with closed eyes, and most often when I opened my eyes, Bhagavan appeared to be watching me. It is a great comfort even now to recall the experience of those exquisite moments that stand out so vividly in my memory.

Bhagavan's physical absence has been no handicap, for he continues to guide me in dream visions, and in so many other ways.

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1. Eventually, Bhagavan's *samadhi* came up at the place he himself had indicated. (*See* photograph no.15 of Sri Ramana's shrine.)

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Suri Nagamma (1902-80) is known for her 273 letters in Telugu, written during 1945-50, at the behest of her elder brother, who was an executive in a commercial bank and a devotee of Sri Ramana. These letters faithfully record discussions the devotees and visitors had with the Maharshi and happenings at the Ashram. In addition to *Letters from Sri Ramanasramam,* her two other books are: *My Life at Sri Ramanasramam* and *Letters from and Recollections of Sri Ramanasramam.* Nagamma in a way acted as

Sri Ramana's secretary in regard to copying from scriptures, writings etc., where Telugu language was involved.

My father passed away when I was four years old, and my mother, when I was ten. When hardly eleven years, I was married. Only a year later my husband passed away. As years rolled by, I began to understand the ways of the world. Religious discourses, devotional songs and similar matters began to attract me.

Being born in a village not having even an elementary school, I looked after my education by learning to read and write with the help of elders. I read Pothana's *Bhagavatam* over and over again. One day I prayed with all sincerity that I should have a *siddha pursha* like Kapila Mahamuni[1] for a guru. I wept and wept and getting tired, fell asleep. During the sleep, I had the *darshan* of a sage seated in a *padmasana* pose on a pedestal three feet high facing south with a *mouna mudra* like Lord Dakshinamurthi.[2] There was a holy aura around him. When I saw that brilliant figure a thrill went down my spine. I tried to get up to offer my salutations to him and so involuntarily opened my eyes. The vision disappeared. That was in 1913. Since then I have had that vision imprinted in my mind. Whenever I was reminded of that vision, I used to pray to God that I should have the privilege of serving such a sage in my lifetime.

In 1941, my elder brother went on a pilgrimage to the South. He happened to go to Tiruvannamalai also and have Bhagavan's *darshan*. Luckily for me, it occurred to him that I too would be greatly benefited by going there. As the daughter of one of our uncles was at the Ashram after her husband's death, my brother agreed to send me there.

I entered the hall full of nervousness, bowed before Bhagavan and sat with bent head in the place reserved for ladies. After about ten minutes I lifted my head and found Bhagavan looking at me intensely. His compassionate look calmed my mind, but as I could not withstand its intensity, I involuntarily bent my head again. Though for the next ten days Bhagavan had not spoken to me, I was deeply impressed by him. I found in him a resemblance to the *siddha purusha* who had once came into my dream, and also saw in him all the attributes of a *jivanmukta* as described in the *Vasistham* and other vedantic books.

He seemed unattached to anything like water on a lotus leaf, sparkling in the sun. As I observed Bhagavan from day to day, I felt convinced that he was the person who could dispel my ignorance and that I should surrender myself into his care. However, I could not summon enough courage to say so.

One day, I took courage and wrote eight verses on *saranagati* and, being afraid to handover them to Bhagavan personally, gave them to his attendant Madhavaswami. The Master read the verses and said to Madhavaswami, "Look, her name is Nagamma. These are verses on *saranagati*, paste them in the book."[3] I felt very happy. I intuitively felt that I have found my haven and decided to stay on at the Ashram permanently.

After I received the grace of Bhagavan, like Ahalya getting rid of her past ignorance by the touch of the dust of the holy feet of Sri Rama, the darkness got dispelled from my mind. Bhagavan's grace began to flow towards me steadily like water flowing through a parched field, making it blossom. I started my *sadhana* by enquiring into the origin of all thoughts. Bhagavan gave me peace of mind and contentment.

It is natural for any devotee to sing praise of the guru after receiving his grace. The tendency to write poems, which had been dormant in me, began to come out. In 1943, I composed songs describing Bhagavan's life, which were sung before him. While going on the hill one afternoon, it seems Bhagavan said to his attendant Rangaswami, "Look, people write saying that I am this *avatar* and that. Do you know what Nagamma has written? He is the omnipresent, omnipotent Self, and is born to show us the path for realisation of the Self. Where is Vijayawada and where is Arunachala? She has come from there and is staying here all alone. What can we say about it? The nature of the people reveals itself according to their *samskaras.* Her *samskaras* are like that."

A few days later, I wrote four verses under the title '*Prarthana*' and placed them before Bhagavan. Seeing them he began to laugh to himself. Noticing this, Bhagavan's another attendant Rajagopala Iyer asked what had been written. With a smile he said, "These four verses are written as a prayer. The second verse is amusing. It seems, after I left the hill and settled down here, I have no monkeys to serve me. So, 'why not accept my mind which is a monkey for service? This monkey is after material things. Tie it down or chastise it; but see that it does service to you.' Adi Sankara in *Sivananda Lahari* has written a *sloka* approximating to the idea, wherein he says: "O, Lord Sankara! You are a *bhikshu.* Why not tie down my mind, known as monkey, to your stick and go about begging? You will then get alms in abundance."

In 1943, I got a letter from my brother in Vijayawada asking me to visit him. While Bhagavan was returning from the *goshala,* I approached him saying that my relatives want me to visit them and I am afraid of

falling again in the vortex of their family affairs. Smilingly Bhagavan said, "When everyone is falling into us, where is the question of our falling into others?" And walked away. I did not at that time understand the significance of what Bhagavan had said till I reached Madras on my way to Vijayawada. When I reached Madras, I found a message for me asking me to wait till the arrival of my brother so that I may accompany them to the Ashram, which they wanted to visit. I was greatly surprised.

Between 1943 and 1945, I wrote several verses such as *Nakshatramala, Arpana, Balakrishna Geetavali* and *Ramana Satakam.* I also commenced writing letters to my elder brother, as was desired by him, about the happenings at the Ashram.

A lady from Andhra at the Ashram could sing melodiously. She began singing devotional songs composed by reputable Andhra pandits substituting the word Rama with Ramana. As the songs were pregnant with meaning and she was an accomplished singer, everyone felt happy. When asked, she said she herself had written the songs.

Some devotees asked her to write down the songs for translation into English. She showed the songs to Bhagavan and requested him to get them translated. Bhagavan merely handed them over to Munagala Venkataramiah [author of the famous book *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*], who happened to be there at the time. Venkataramiah asked me to explain the meanings of some difficult Telugu words. I agreed to do so, and also told him that some elders wrote these songs about Rama long ago. He straight went to Bhagavan, who smilingly said , "Oh! Is that so? When I noticed the language and the great ideas behind them I thought that ancient scholars must have composed them. What does it matter? When people come here they feel like writing or singing something. Poets write on their own; others copy the writings of someone else and substitute Ramana for Rama. The words Rama and Ramana are one and the same. So what do you say? Will you carry on with the translation?" Asked Bhagavan. All kept quiet.

Servers in the kitchen usually devoted special attention to Bhagavan. One night, milk pudding was prepared and a little more than usual was served to Bhagavan. He burst out instantly: Again the same nonsense. When it comes to serving Bhagavan, the ladle is immersed fully, while it is immersed only half for others. How often have I told you not to do so? When the ladle is in his hand, the server thinks he is powerful as the District Collector and can do anything without fear. And Bhagavan went on talking in that strain rebuking all concerned.[4]

One day in 1945-46, I went to the Ashram late in the afternoon. Devotees were munching some ripe coconuts which had fallen on the ground. As soon as Bhagavan saw me he said, "There she is, Nagamma has come. Give her also a portion." "Ayyo! It is all exhausted," exclaimed those nearby. Then Bhagavan called me near him and gave me all he had in his hand. On my protest he said, "I have already eaten. Your share only is leftover." I accepted it as a *mahaprasadam* and ate it with relish. To me it appeared like nectar. My joy was indescribable.

Once a devotee asked Bhagavan the significance of fasting. With a benevolent look, he said, "If all activities of *indriyas* are given up, the mind becomes single pointed. When such a mind gets concentrated upon God, it is real *upavasam*. *'Upa'* means near and *'vasam'* means living. Where is he going to live? He will live in his Self. Desires are the food of mind. Giving them up is the *upavasam.* One who can 'fast' the mind, need not fast the body. For those who cannot fast the mind, fasting the body has been suggested so as to purify the mind."

A lady devotee from Andhra staying at the Ashram, began to conceive Bhagavan as Lord Krishna and herself as a *gopika.* She even wrote to Bhagavan accordingly and started publicising about it. Bhagavan remained untouched by such trivialities but I could not keep quiet after seeing atrocious writings of her, which Bhagavan handed over to me. I rebuked the lady. She flared up and began writing all sorts of nasty things about me. On seeing them, Bhagavan said laughingly, "Here are the papers from her. All about you only." One day with tears in my eyes I told Bhagavan, "I cannot read such letters. Please do not give me her letters," and he stopped doing so. Some days later the lady went berserk and her husband had to be called to take her away.

Sometime in November 1949, I received a letter from her enquiring about Bhagavan's health as she had received reports about his declining health. She had also apologised for what she had done to me earlier, and requested for an early reply. I informed Bhagavan about the letter. He simply said, "Is it so?" and kept quiet for about three days.

During those days the usual graciousness in his look was absent whenever I prostrated before him; instead he used to turn his face away from me. It then occurred to me that the cause was my ill will towards that lady, and not replying to her. I therefore immediately wrote back to her and came to Bhagavan. When I got up after the usual prostration he looked at me graciously. When I told him that I was coming after posting the letter,

he told his attendants who were there, "Look, Nagamma has sent a reply to that Telugu lady who had written to her that she had abused her sometime back but now she realised her mistake and wanted to be excused and know about Bhagavan's health." He thereafter turned to me with a benign and benevolent look.

Narrating this incident I told someone that renunciation could never be real if anger and resentment remained in the mind. Though the lady had behaved senselessly, Bhagavan always had compassion for her. He also made me understand in his inimitable way that I should not harbour any ill will towards her.

When the summer set in, Bhagavan started staying all the time in the Jubilee Hall.[5] At midday, when it was hot, the attendants shifted Bhagavan's sofa to the north where there was a bower with crotons on either side and water was sprinkled on *khas-khas tatties* [6] that were tied around.

One afternoon I happened to go there. Bhagavan was seated with a cloth over his body and the head. There was no one except his attendant Krishnaswami. He was standing behind Bhagavan with a sprinkler in his hand, which appeared to be full of rose water. He opened the screw cap to sprinkle the rose water on Bhagavan like a light shower of rain. When Bhagavan saw me, he said, "Look! They are doing *abhishekam* to me. They have covered me with this wet cloth. They have tied *tatties* all around and are sprinkling water thereon. This place is now cool like Ootacamund." After a while, Bhagavan in a reminiscent mood began to talk:

When I was in the Virupaksha Cave, we used to change over to the Mango Cave during summer, as there was no water at the former. At the Mango Cave, at midday, some women of the lower castes, with heavy loads of grass on their heads and very tired, used to come in search of water. Poor people, they start from their homes after taking a little gruel, go up the hill and secure a head load of grass. As soon as they came to the cave they would throw down their bundles, bend down and say, "Swami, Swami, first throw a vesselful of water down our spines." I would throw water on them as desired, to make them recover from their exhaustion. Then, making a cup of both the hands they would drink stomach-full of water, wash their faces, take some rest and depart. They alone could experience the happiness of it all.

When I enquired whether it was Bhagavan who poured the water, he answered in the affirmative and added, "I knew they would be coming at that hour and so I used to wait with the water. What could they do?

Being of low caste, they were not allowed to go near the tank and there was no water anywhere else. The heat was unbearable. They could not have food unless they sold the grass and got some money. They had children at home. They must reach home quickly to look after them. What could they do, poor people! They used to come to the cave in the hope that the Swami will supply water. We were not cooking at that time. If any day we did cook, we poured a lot of water into the rice while cooking and made gruel by adding salt and ginger, if available. By the time they came, the gruel water would be quite cool. When a tumbler of it was poured into their hands, they drank it like nectar. They alone could know the taste of that gruel and the happiness which followed the drink." After saying this, Bhagavan got filled with emotion and assumed silence.

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1. Mentioned in the *Bhagavatam*.
2. *Refer* annexure-V on Dakshinamurthi, p. 415.
3. Big bound volume in the Ashram kept for this purpose.
4. *Refer* p.74 also for Sri Ramana's displeasure in this regard.
5. The pandal erected outside the meditation hall at the time of the Golden Jubilee celebrations in 1946.
6. *Khas-khas* is the grass obtained from the roots of a plant. It releases fragrance and makes the air cool when water is poured on it. *Tatties* are like mesh made by thin bamboo sticks in which the *khas-khas* is woven.

40

Arthur Osborne (1907-1970), an Oxford-educated Britisher, had a high level of spiritual inclination since his university days. He was the founder-editor of *The Mountain Path*. He edited *Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi* and authored *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge; Ramana-Arunachala; My Life and Quest; Be Still, It Is The Wind That Sings;* and *The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi in His Own Words*. He was greatly influenced by French philosopher Rene Guenon, whose book *La Crise du Monde Moderne* was translated by him as *The Crisis of the Modern World*.

Osborne was a lecturer in English at a university in Bangkok. In 1941 he came to India on long leave. While in Bangkok, Osborne

had heard of the Maharshi and had received some of his writings and photographs, which had 'made a tremendous impact' on him. But as one of his Guenon group[1] members, who had a house at Tiruvannamalai reported to him that the Maharshi was not a guru and did not give initiation, which he was looking for, he along with his family went to other places in India for holidaying during his leave period. When Osborne had to go back to Bangkok alone due to the war condition, he left his wife and three children with his friend, David MacIver[2] at Tiruvannamalai. Osborne came to Tiruvannamalai in 1945. Regarding the meetings his wife and he had with the Maharshi, Osborne writes:

My wife entered the hall and sat down. Immediately, **Bhagavan turned his luminous eyes on her in a gaze so concentrated that there was a vibration she could actually hear.** She returned the gaze, losing all sense of time, the mind stilled, feeling like a bird caught by a snake, yet glad to be caught. She wrote to me that all her doubts had vanished; her objections no longer mattered. She had complete faith. **The most beautiful face, she told me, looked commonplace beside him, even though his features were not good. His eyes had the innocence of a small child, together with unfathomable wisdom and immense love.**

She felt Bhagavan's power and guidance constantly. During the years of our separation – most of those years with no news of one another – she did not worry, although by temperament prone to worrying. When offered a job she did not accept it: the time to go into the world would come later; this was the time to be with Bhagavan.

Bhagavan was very gracious during these years both to her and the children. They would come and show him their toys and tell their secrets. In general, Bhagavan avoided touching people or being touched by them. But each cool season when my wife brought the children back from the hills, he touched Frania, the youngest, at some time or other, and once he picked her up and carried her.

While communications were still open, I had received a letter from my wife telling me that my eldest daughter Catherine and my son Adam had gone to Bhagavan and asked him to bring me back safely and that he had smiled and nodded. From then on, she said that she never doubted that I should come out of it alive. There was also a letter from Catherine (seven years), one of the most moving I have ever received. "Daddy, you will love Bhagavan. **When he smiles everybody must be so happy.**"

Of all those I had known in the camp at Bangkok[3] only Louis Hartz, a Dutch, was drawn to Bhagavan and came to Tiruvannamalai. Bhagavan was very gracious to him. He received initiation by look. Although he was told by the devotees that this was Bhagavan's mode of initiation, he wanted to make quite sure and therefore said, "I want Bhagavan's initiation." Bhagavan replied, "You have it already."

This is the only occasion of which I know when Bhagavan explicitly confirmed having given initiation. Hartz also desired an assurance from Bhagavan. He perhaps feared that when he got back into life of the world with all its distractions, his steadfastness might weaken. He asked Bhagavan for some guarantee and was given the tremendous assurance: "Even if you let go of Bhagavan, Bhagavan will never let go of you."[4]

Bhagavan did not immediately reveal himself to me. I felt far less from his bodily presence than I had from his invisible support in the camp. His photograph had been more real and vivid to me than any person, and yet now that I saw him face to face I felt his presence much less.

I entered the hall before Bhagavan had returned from his daily walk on the hill. I had expected something grander and less intimate. When he entered, there was no great impression; certainly far less than his photographs had made. Just a white-haired, very gracious man, walking a little stiffly from rheumatism with a slight stoop. As soon as he eased himself on the couch he smiled at me and then turned to those around and to my young son and said, "So Adam's prayers have been answered; his Daddy has come back safely." I felt his kindness but no more. I appreciated that it was for my sake that he had spoken English, since Adam knew Tamil.

The change came a few weeks later at one of the yearly festivals. There were huge crowds for the festival and we were sitting in the courtyard outside the hall. Bhagavan was reclining on his couch and I was sitting in the front row. He sat up, facing me, and his narrowed eyes pierced into me with an intensity I cannot describe. It was as though they said, "You have been told; why have you not realised?" And then I felt quietness, a depth of peace, an indescribable lightness and happiness.

Thereafter, love for Bhagavan began to grow in my heart and I felt his power and beauty. Next morning for the first time, sitting before him in the hall, I tried to follow his teaching by using *vichara*, 'Who am I?' I thought it was I who had decided. I did not realise that it was the initiation by look that had vitalised me and changed my attitude of mind. Indeed, I had only heard vaguely of this initiation and paid little heed to what I had heard. Only later did I learn that other devotees also had such an experience,

and that with them also it had marked the beginning of the active *sadhana* (quest) and Bhagavan's guidance.

Then, **for the first time in my life, I began to understand what the grace and blessings of a guru could mean.** My love and devotion to Bhagavan deepened. I went about with a lilt of happiness in my heart, feeling the blessing and mystery of the guru, repeating, like a love song, that he was the Guru, the link between heaven and earth, between God and me, between the Formless Being and my heart. I became aware of the enormous grace of his presence. Even outwardly he was gracious to me, smiling when I entered the hall, signalling to me to sit where he could watch me in meditation.

And then one day a vivid reminder awoke in me: "The link with the Formless Being? But he is the Formless Being." And I began to understand why devotees address him simply as 'Bhagavan'. So he began to prove in me what he declared in his teaching that the outer guru seems to awaken the guru in the heart. The constant 'Who am I?' *vichara* began to evoke an awareness of the Self as Bhagavan outwardly, and also simultaneously of the Self within.

The specious theory that Bhagavan was not a guru had simply evaporated in the radiance of his Grace. Moreover, I now perceived that, far from his teaching not being practical guidance, it was exclusively that. I observed that he shunned theoretical explanations and kept turning the questioner to practical considerations of *sadhana*, of the path to be followed. It was that and only that he was here to teach.

Bhagavan was the most simple, natural, unassuming of men; he was what a man should be, quite without affectation, like a child; and at the same time with an indescribable beauty and wisdom and with such power that many trembled in his presence and feared to speak to him. To address him in the third person as 'Bhagavan', seemed appropriate than saying 'you' to one who was leading us beyond the duality of 'you' and 'I'. In simple daily affairs he would play the part of an individual, just as an actor could play Lear's frenzy without himself being frenzied, without supposing he was Lear.[5] Unfortunately, few in the West understand the possibility of this supreme state.

There was an air of modesty, of utter simplicity, a childlike defencelessness in Bhagavan. The mere sight of him walking across the Ashram ground was enough to grip the heart.

His manner of life was the most normal. The love that shone in his eyes, the luminous understanding, cannot be described. Someone has come

to the Ashram broken down with the hopeless grief of bereavement, and Bhagavan, after hearing the story simply looked, no word spoken, and peace flooded the soul.

He called nothing as his. He never asked for anything. He refused to have any special consideration shown to him. He refused to have an electric table fan because the devotees would not benefit equally. Later, ceiling fans were installed and all benefited alike. He never asked anyone to come or told any to go. He never pressed any to stay. And yet he watched over each one with the loving solicitude of a mother for her only child.

He was affable and courteous to all comers. There was no pontifical solemnity in his expositions; on the contrary, his speech was vivacious. A devotee asked why his prayers were not answered and Bhagavan replied laughing, "If they were, you might stop praying."

Bhagavan Sri Ramana was meticulously exact. His daily life was conducted with a punctiliousness that Indians today would have to call pure Western. In everything he was precise and orderly. The books were always in their places. The loincloth, which was all he wore, was gleaming white. The two clocks in the hall were adjusted daily to radio time. The calendar was never allowed to fall behind the date.

He was Divine Grace in human form. While fully human, he was fully in *samadhi*, fully divine, alike when talking and when sitting silent. He merely responded according to the need of those who approached him. He was all love, and yet for weeks together he might not favour a devotee with a single look or smile.

Bhagavan was a *jivanmukta*, emancipated while yet in the physical body. He was indeed the universal Divine Guru.

One who has attained the supreme state is above all forms of religion. They are the paths leading up to the peak, but he is the peak itself, and everything else. He came to answer the need of our age, proclaiming a path which, with his grace and support, can be followed by aspirants of any religion, and indeed whether they observed any formal religion or not.

Bhagavan's initiation was not given freely and openly; it was concealed. Had it been open, the constant stream of visitors from India and abroad would have demanded it, putting Bhagavan under the necessity of accepting one and rejecting another; for ordinarily many seek initiation without pledging themselves to the quest, merely as a sort of spiritual tonic. If asked, Bhagavan would never deny that he gave initiation, but he would also not openly affirm it.

Being the universal Guru, Bhagavan proclaimed his teaching openly. It has been usual for a guru to maintain secrecy about methods of training. Under Bhagavan's guidance, however, understanding and aspiration were the only qualifications, and their absence the only barriers.

Man has three functions: thought, action and being. 'Being' underlies the other two and is the necessary substratum for them, and yet is almost completely overshadowed by them. The simile Bhagavan made use of was of a cinema screen on which film is shown. The spectators become aware of the picture, which are only shadows on the screen, which is unaffected by them. A fire in the picture does not burn the screen nor a flood makes it wet. Sometimes he gave the example of the actor on a stage playing a certain part, although knowing that he is not really that person; sometimes of a bank cashier who pays out thousands coolly and efficiently, knowing that it is not his money that he is paying.

After two or three years at Tiruvannamalai, when it became necessary to earn an income, I took up a job as an assistant editor of a newspaper in Madras.Thus, a period of intensive training was followed by the practice of Self-enquiry in the life of the world. I took with me a life-sized reproduction of the photograph painted over in oils, a gift from a devotee, and showed it to Bhagavan before leaving. He took it in his hands and then gave it back to me saying, "He is taking Swami with him." Since then it has looked at me with the love and compassion of a Guru and spoken more profoundly than all other portraits.

Thereafter I went to Tiruvannamalai only for weekends and holidays, and each visit was revitalizing. **The graciousness of Bhagavan's reception melted the heart and awoke a feeling of guilt as to how great was the reward for so little effort made.** I was there on that fateful April night of the body's death. Since that day his presence in the heart has been more vital, the outpouring of the grace more abundant, his support more powerful.

After bringing out some books on Bhagavan, Osborne shifted to Calcutta in 1952 as a school headmaster. He narrates the post-* mahanirvana *experiences of himself and his family:

One June morning in 1956, the first awakening to Reality occurred. I was alone in the room when I woke up and sat up in bed. I just was – my Self, the beginningless, immutable Self. I had thought 'nothing is changed'. There was no excitement, no joy or ecstasy, an immeasurable contentment, the natural state, the wholeness of simple being. There was the thought: 'It

is impossible ever to be bored.' The mind seemed like a dark screen that had shut our true consciousness and was now rolled up and pushed away. It is the mind that craves activity and feels bored when it does not get it; the Self is untouched by activity and abides in its pristine state of simple happiness.

From the window of my room in Calcutta I saw the roofs of houses with crows wheeling between them. Again there was a paradox, the feeling that all this was at the same time both real and unreal. This is a paradox that has been much commented on, because it is stressed in Zen teachings. It is what Tennyson was trying to express in the line of 'The Princess' where he says: 'And all things were and were not'.

I do not know how long the experience lasted. In any case, while it lasted it was timeless and therefore eternal. Imperceptibly the mind closed over again, but less opaque, for a radiant happiness continued. I had my bath, dressed and went into the sitting room, where I sat down and held the newspaper up in front of me as though I was reading it. I was too vibrant with happiness really to read. The after glow continued for several weeks, only gradually fading out.

At about the same time my wife also had a glimpse of Realisation. It was a great help and support to be together on the path and often our experiences tallied. My daughter Frania (24 years) also had a glimpse some eighteen months later. A Tamilian devotee living in Calcutta had invited us to a celebration of Bhagavan's *jayanti.* There was singing of religious songs. I could see from the beauty and serenity of Frania's face that she was enjoying an exceptionally good meditation. Later I learned that it was even more than that; when she wrote it down: "I am not the mind nor the body – found myself in the heart; the me that lives after death. There was a breath-taking joy in the feeling 'I am', the greatest possible joy, and the full enjoyment of existence. No way to describe it. Gradually – rapidly – my body seemed to be expanding from the heart. It engulfed the whole universe. I couldn't identify myself as any speck in that vastness, there was only God, nothing but God. The word 'I' had no meaning any more; it meant the whole universe – everything is God, the only reality."

Osborne left Calcutta for Tiruvannamalai in 1958, where he settled for good. He wrote many books and was the founder-editor of* The Mountain Path *from 1964 till his death in 1970, when his wife Lucia succeeded him as editor till the end of 1973. Osborne wrote a large number of poems on Bhagavan and Arunachala. A representative

piece out of these is given below:

Heart of my being, seen outwardly as one
In human form, to draw my human love,
Lord Ramana, Guru, the risen Sun,
Self Manifest, the Guide of all who rove
Lost and alone
In tangled thought and vain misgivings.

* * *

Such have I known,
Him of lustrous eyes, Him whose sole look
Pierced to the heart, wherein the seed was sown
Of wisdom deeper than in holy books
Of Truth alone
Not to be learned but lived.

* * *

Thou art the Sun of suns,
Dispel my darkness,
Grant me wisdom, I beseech Thee
Shake me out of this torpor
I beseech Thee, Bhagavan.

* * *

A prey to my unsteady mind
I lack patience, I lack constancy, I lack purity.
Forgive the grievous wrong of that poor self,
And do as Thou wilt, Thou who knowest best.
But grant me only ever increasing love
For Thy Feet.

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1. Followers of French philosopher Guenon, who said: 'Being is one, and therefore by realising your true Self you realise your identity with Divine, the Universal Being.
2. No.126 relates to Mrs.MacIver.
3. The Japanese had put him and many foreigners in a concentration camp.

4. Sri Ramana never used any personal pronoun while referring to himself. He mostly used the word as employed by the party addressing him, which usually was 'Bhagavan'.
5. Reference is to Shakespeare's play *King Lear*.

41

Prof. G.V. Subbaramayya who taught English at a College in Nellore, Andhra Pradesh, was also a scholar of Telugu. He was one of the privileged few who moved with Sri Ramana with childlike familiarity. His writings include rendering of Kalidasa's *Megha-Doota* into Telugu verse and collection of his English poems in two volumes. His *Sri Ramana Reminiscences* was originally written in Telugu. He translated *Sri Ramana Gita* into Telugu.

My first visit to Sri Ramanasramam was in June 1933. In the previous December I had suffered bereavement when my two-year-old son died suddenly. I had been reading the works of Sri Ramana and was struck with wonder at the style of Telugu *Upadesa Saaram,* which in its simplicity, felicity and classic finish could equal that of the greatest Telugu poet Tikkana. I had felt convinced that a Tamilian who could compose such Telugu verse must be divinely inspired, and I wanted to see Him.

But my immediate quest at the time was for peace and solace. I had *darshan* of Sri Bhagavan in the Hall. **As our eyes met, there was a miraculous effect on my mind. I felt as if I had plunged into a pool of peace, and with eyes shut, sat in a state of ecstasy for nearly an hour.** When I came to normal consciousness, I made bold to ask Him a question: "The *Gita* says that mortals cast off their worn-out bodies and acquire new bodies, just as one casts away the worn-out clothes and wears new garments. How does this apply to the death of infants whose bodies are new and fresh?" Bhagavan promptly replied, "How do you know that the body of the dead child was not worn-out? It may not be apparent; but unless it is worn-out it will not die."

After a gap of three years, I went again to the Ashram with a note of introduction. Bhagavan gave me a knowing nod and gracious smile and said, "Why the introduction? You have come before. You are not new." To add to my wonderment, I now felt as though my dead father had come back alive; the resemblance was so striking. That settled my relationship

to Sri Ramana for all time. My approach to Him has ever since been that of a child to its parents, quite fearless, free and familiar.

After returning home, I wrote to the Ashram offering my literary services. In reply I was asked to attempt a Telugu verse-translation of *Sri Ramana Gita.* In *Dasarah* vacation, I offered the completed translation at the feet of Bhagavan, who at my request scrutinized the manuscript and made the necessary corrections. On the eve of my departure, I told Bhagavan the suffering of my wife who was grief-striken by the bereavement."Has she no male child afterwards?" enquired He. I replied "No". Bhagavan sighed and said, "Alas! What a pity!" This took place on October 18, 1936. My wife delivered a male child on August 1, 1937.

Later, seeing me busy with *Sri Ramana Gita,* Bhagavan jokingly observed, "For your college work you draw a salary. What is your payment for this labour?" I replied that I sought a much higher reward than monetary remuneration. Curiously, I received a surprise offer next month of Chief Examinership. It was so unexpected that in the circumstances I regarded it as a miracle of His grace.

V.Ananthachari took immense pains in the printing of the Telugu *Sri Ramana Gita.*When his services were appreciatively referred to in the preface, he pleaded hard with Bhagavan that his name should not be mentioned. Bhagavan told him, "Why do you worry? To ask for the omission of name is as much egotism as to desire its inclusion. After all, who knows who is Ananthachari?"

One morning, M.V.Ramaswami Iyer [No.94], who was sitting beside me in the Hall, happened to go through my notebook which contained my free verse compositions in English. He was so pleased that he at once showed them to Bhagavan, who read aloud the piece "I and Thou", and as He reached the last words: "I without me am Thou. Thou without Thee art I. Indeed I and Thou are one." He burst into laughter. I casually quoted Tagore's song: "I run like the musk-deer, mad with my own perfume. I seek what I cannot get, I get what I do not seek." Bhagavan liked it so much that He explained its meaning to His devotees in Tamil.

I enquired whether Poetry and other Fine Arts could be used as a *sadhana* (means) for Self-realisation. Bhagavan said, "Anything that makes for concentration of mind is a help. But in the cultivation of every Art, there comes a stage when you feel that you have had enough of it, and you would then transcend it." When I pointed out that some learned persons consider *rasa* (aesthetic pleasure) as *Brahmananda sahodaram* (akin to the Bliss of the Absolute), Bhagavan said, "Why *sahodaram*

(akin)? It is *Brahmananda* itself. For have not the scriptures proclaimed *raso wai sah* (He is *rasa*)? Indeed *Brahmananda* is the real *rasa.* All other *rasas* are only its shadows."

The morning before I left, Dr. Syed, Professor of Philosophy, Allahabad University [No.23], asked Bhagavan, "What is the purpose of creation?" Usually Bhagavan gave replies in Tamil, Telugu or Malayalam. This time He spoke directly in English, and asked, "Can the eye see itself?" Dr. Syed replied, "Of course not. It can see everything else, but not itself." To Bhagavan's question that "if it wants to see itself", he said, "It can see itself only in a mirror." Bhagavan then commented, "That is it. Creation is the mirror for the 'I' to see itself."

At Bhagavan's instance I translated into Telugu verse His selections from *Yoga Vasistham*. In the last verse which says, 'whatever part you have taken in life, play it well,' I added in Telugu rendering the phrase *saisava lila* (the sport of childhood). Bhagavan appreciated it by saying, "It was a happy phrase and correctly portrays the attitude of mind one should cultivate according to the *slokas.* Has not the Christ said, 'Unless thou be as children, thou shalt not enter the Kingdom of God?'"

Having learnt that Dr.Rajendra Prasad [Later President of India] and Jamana Lal Bajaj [Treasurer, Indian National Congress] were coming for Bhagavan's *darshan,* I wrote and sent two verses in Telugu saying that their visit to the Ashram was in keeping with the ancient Indian tradition of rulers being entertained in the *rishi ashramas*. The Ashram in their reply of August 16, 1938 wrote: "Sri Rajendra Babu was entering the Hall when Bhagavan was reading your letter. How happy it would have been if the whole country had but one language! Two stanzas were much appreciated and have gone into the record."

One morning Bhagavan quoted from a journal the following sentence, "Where psychology ends, philosophy begins", and added His own remark, "Where philosophy ends spirituality begins." When someone asked how the sensuous, intellectual and spiritual joys are correlated, Bhagavan said, "All other joys are like the foam and bubbles to the ocean of *Brahmananda* (the joy of the Absolute)."

Bhagavan obeyed every Ashram rule scrupulously. When, for instance, the dinner bell rang in the middle of some singing or *parayana*, He would immediately get up saying jocularly, "The Ashram is giving *bhiksha* out of grace. If we delay, they will be justified in refusing to serve us food. So let us hasten!"

Bhagavan spoke commending the practice of going round the Hill. He said, "Other sacred hills are described as the abodes of some deity. But Arunachala is God Himself in the shape of a Hill. So special sanctity attaches to going round Arunachala."

One Somasundaraswami approached Bhagavan with a new notebook and requested him to write one *aksharam* (letter) in it first. *Aksharam* also means the indestructible (Self). So Bhagavan wrote in Tamil, "One *aksharam* shines always of Itself in the Heart. How could it be written?"

Once Bhagavan narrated in a most dramatic and thrilling manner the story of King Janaka and Sage Ashtavakra to show how self-surrender automatically brings about Self-realisation. Having read in the scriptures that the Self could be realised in the interval between a rider putting one foot in the stirrup and raising the other foot for mounting the horse, the king summoned all pandits in his kingdom, who having failed to answer him satisfactorily brought Sage Ashtavakra to save themselves.

The Sage asked the king to follow him alone with a horse outside the city, where he asked Janaka to place one foot in the stirrup and raise the other foot, and then said, "Now comes the supreme condition, you must surrender yourself. Are you willing?" Janaka said, "Yes." From that moment Janaka stood transfixed with one foot in the stirrup and the other dangling in the air, apparently like a statue. (Here Bhagavan imitated the posture of Janaka). King's people seeing him in that state begged the Sage to show grace. Then, as the Sage said, "Janaka, why are you like this? Ride home on the horse," he rode home and obeyed the Sage in everything like a bonded slave.

One day, while going up the Hill, Bhagavan referred to the misunderstanding between two prominent devotees and wanted me to convey to them the following message: "Whoever condemns us is our friend. For he condemns only our body, which is our enemy. The enemy's enemy is the best friend. We should really beware of those who praise us." The next morning I met the two devotees to convey Bhagavan's message. Even before I opened my mouth, they both expressed their eagerness to make up their quarrel.

One morning at breakfast, Bhagavan asked me, "Do you know this chutney?" I replied, "No. It tastes excellent though." He smiled and said, "It is bitter-gourd." It could hardly be believed but for Bhagavan saying it, because it had no trace of bitterness. On the other hand, it was very palatable. Then I composed a Telugu verse expressing wonder how

Bhagavan could remove bitterness so completely from raw bitter-gourd, and praying that He might likewise wipe out the bitterness of ego from within us. As soon as he returned from his usual walk on the Hill, I showed him the piece. He explained that sour mango and coconut were mixed to counteract and suppress the bitter taste in the chutney, and added, "Bitter-gourd is good for digestion and it also acts as a laxative."

In the evening Bhagavan referred to the description of the Self as "the smallest of atoms, the biggest of big things." He said, "The hailstone falls in the ocean. At once it melts and becomes the ocean itself. Likewise, the source of the Self is a pinpoint. When it is searched for, it disappears, and only the fullness remains."

The next day Bhagavan casually narrated the story of Mira Bai's visit to a well-known swami in Mathura, whose disciples refused her permission for *darshan* on the ground that their guru did not meet women. Mira Bai observed: "I thought that there is only one *Purusha* [her Girdhar Gopal] and all the rest of us are women." When these words were communicated by the disciples to the guru, he at once realised that Mira Bai was a *jnani,* and he came out and saluted her.

At the time of Bhagavan's *shashtipurti* in December 1939, when I reached the Ashram, I was suffering from severe partial headache, which was the aftereffect of a fever. A devotee friend noticing signs of suffering on my face, enquired about my ailment in a loud tone. I came out of the Hall and told him about my trouble. As soon as I returned to my seat, Sri Bhagavan enquired what the matter was and got details of my disease and treatment. Unable to sit on account of pain, I went and lay behind a shelf in the bookstall. At about 10 a.m. an Ashram worker brought coffee for someone and missing him, pressed me to take it. The moment I drank it, the pain suddenly subsided and never recurred afterwards.

One day in December 1939, Devaraja Mudaliar [No.35], an intimate devotee, asked how Bhagavan could observe distinction among His devotees. "For instance", he added, "Shall we be wrong if we say that Subbaramayya is shown a little more favour than others?"Bhagavan smilingly replied, "To me there is no distinction. Grace is flowing like the ocean ever full. Every one draws from it according to capacity. How can one who brings only a tumbler complain that he is not able to take as much as another who brought a jar?" Once Bhagavan quoted two Tamil verses of poet Muruganar [No.53], and explained them as follows: (i) That which is said to be beyond the beyond and which is at the same time inside of the inside and shines within the Heart itself, the Real Self is verily Sri Ramana,

do adore Him. (ii) Like the cock that throws aside the diamond taking it to be a pebble, you may also belittle this Arunachala Ramana mistaking Him for a common fellow man, while He is really the Supreme Self. So beware!

In June 1940, I was blessed with the rare good fortune of working with Bhagavan in the kitchen, where He would come punctually at 2.30 a.m. and spend some time in cutting vegetables with the workers and devotees. Then He would prepare *sambhar* or chutney for breakfast, and occasionally some extra dishes also. As I saw Bhagavan perspiring profusely near the oven, I tried to fan Him, but He objected. He would not allow any special attention to be shown to Him. I stopped, but as He got engrossed in work, I gently repeated fanning. He turned to me, laughed and said, "You want to do it on the sly. But do not even know how to do it effectively; let me teach you." So saying He held me by the hand and taught me the proper way of waving the fan. Oh! How I was thrilled at His touch and thanked my ignorance! From the kitchen He would adjourn to another room for grinding the mixture. I did not know at first how to hold the pestle and grind. Bhagavan placed His hand upon mine and turned the pestle in the proper way. Again, what a thrill! How blessed was my ignorance! After the work was finished, He would take out a bit from the dish, taste a little and give us the remainder to taste, and sometimes when our hands were unwashed, He would Himself throw it into our mouths. That would be the climax of our happiness.

One day, at about 3 a.m. when we were with Bhagavan, I was called and told that a party of women and children from my area wanted Bhagavan's *darshan* and blessings, before starting to go round the Hill. When I went inside after curtly telling them that it was impossible to see Him at that time, Bhagavan asked me what the matter was, and said, "Poor people! Why should they go away disappointed? Tell them to come to the back door and I shall meet them there." When informed, they ran there. The whole party fell at His feet, touched them, kissed them and bathed them with tears. I envied the good luck of the party and realised the full force of calling Him *karunapurna sudhabdhi* (the nectareous ocean of grace).

It was June 10, 1940. Bhagavan, Narayana Iyer [No.100] and myself were at work in the grinding room. When the radio announced the fall of Paris to Germany, Narayana Iyer observed, "France, a first-rate power has fallen in three days. Then do you think our Britain could hold out longer than three weeks at the most?" Upon this, Bhagavan observed, "Um! But Russia." Abruptly, He cut short His speech and resumed silence.

Neither of us had the courage to ask Him what Russia was going to do, though it appeared strange that He should mention Russia who was at that time friendly to Germany. It will be remembered that war broke out between Germany and Russia only one year afterwards, and it was Germany's attack on Russia that turned the tide of fortune in favour of the Allies. This incident affords a peep into the omniscience of Bhagavan.

As kitchen workers failed to carry out certain directions of Bhagavan to avoid wastage, He discontinued going to the kitchen. When no amount of apologies and entreaties made Him change His decision, I wrote a Telugu poem *Pakasala Vilapam*[1] which He read out dramatically, enacting the scene in the poem, but did not change His decision. He laughed and told me, "Things happen as they must. It is all for good. These people must not always hang upon me. They must learn to do things by themselves. So don't you worry about it."

Once, after my wife's death in 1942, I complained to Bhagavan saying, "Nowadays she does not even appear to me in dream. So even that comfort is denied to me." At this Bhagavan said, "What! Do you find comfort in a dream vision?" "Yes! Bhagavan, I should be a hypocrite if I hid my real feeling." On hearing this, He sighed and kept silent.

That night when I lay opposite where Bhagavan was sleeping, I dreamt a big *choultry.* The door was ajar. A group of elderly Brahmins blocked the entrance and were peeping in. I heard my old uncle of Benaras saying, "Look there. She is the eldest daughter-in-law of the house. She is not an ordinary woman. *She is all gold."* On hearing this, I too was impelled by curiosity to stand tiptoe behind the Brahmins and beheld my dear, departed wife. She was seated on the floor, and I must confess that never when she was alive did I have such a clear and vivid vision of her as now. A flood of bliss engulfed me for how long I knew not, until there suddenly rushed upon me the consciousness that it was all dream.This thought let loose on me such overpowering sorrow that I started sobbing.

It was then 5 a.m. Bhagavan noticed me and asked "What, why are you like that? Did you have the dream?" Then He said, "Why do you grieve now? You wanted the dream vision and you had it. You thought it would bring comfort, instead it has proved a crushing grief." As if to divert my mind, He enquired, "Did you observe anything beside the *choultry*?"

On hearing this query, I recollected that there was a big river flowing nearby and I told Him so. Then He remarked that the river might be the Ganges and the place Benaras. His words somehow had a soothing effect on my nerves, and lifted the load of sorrow from my heart. That

morning I got a letter from the same uncle of Benaras reminding of the date for my wife's monthly ceremony and asking me to return home in time. When I showed the letter to Bhagavan, He said, "This is really wonderful. This uncle of yours pointed out your wife early this morning, and again now he is pointing to her in this letter."

The whole incident was a grand mystery and made me recollect the famous lines of Shakespeare in his play Hamlet: "There are more things in heaven and earth, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

On April 19, 1950, a devotee returning from the Ashram informed me that on account of the vast crowds that flocked for Bhagavan's *darshan* during his last days, the Ashram provisions were utterly depleted and the Ashram was badly in need of rice. He urged that we both should approach some rich friends. As I was then connected with the University Examinations, I was unwilling to go to anyone for any obligation. He then suggested that I might approach at least N.Venkata Reddy, a philanthropist, who was my old student. But I was reluctant even for that.

Early the next morning what was my wonder to see Venkata Reddy himself drive to my house for the first time since he had been a student many years ago. He said that he came to consult me regarding the scheme for a poor students' scholarship fund that he wanted to institute. He casually noticed the picture of Bhagavan hanging in front and referring to His recent *mahasamadhi* he enquired whether I would go to the Ashram to attend the ceremonies performed after death. I replied in the affirmative and asked whether he would be willing to contribute rice needed for the occasion. He at once replied, "Yes Sir. What greater good can I do than that? I shall carry out whatever you suggest." And as suggested, he sent 1200 kgs of rice to the Ashram. A few days later, another friend volunteered to contribute 600 kgs.

This incident was a godsend to me. For, after the demise of Bhagavan I was passing through the worst depression of mind and spirits. I was feeling like the Pandavas after the passing away of Sri Krishna. I thought that I was now utterly helpless and that the usefulness of my life was at an end. This incident came as an eye opener: Bhagavan was still as powerful as when in flesh and blood and, moreover, was pleased to use me still as His instrument.

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1. 'The agony of the kitchen on being deserted by Sri Ramana.'

42

Major A.W. Chadwick O.B.E. (1890-1962) was in the British army serving in South America. After getting captivated by Brunton's *A Search in Secret India* (no.1), he resigned his post, came to Sri Ramanasramam in November 1935, and remained there for good. He became Sadhu Arunachala and lies buried in the Ashram campus. He rendered into English all the original works of Sri Ramana, which were perused by the Maharshi himself. He authored *A Sadhu's Reminiscences of Ramana Maharshi* (1961).

When I first entered the Hall, he greeted me with his lovely smile and asked if I had my breakfast, and then told me to sit down. Bhagavan talked to me the whole morning and asked me many questions about my life and myself. All this seemed quite natural. He was very interested to hear about Brunton whom I had met in London. I felt the tremendous peace of his presence, his graciousness. It was not as though I was meeting him for the first time. It seemed that I had always known him. In spite of being entirely new to India and its customs, nothing that happened in the first days of my stay at the Ashram seemed strange to me; it was all quite natural.

Whenever people came to Bhagavan with their family stories **he would laugh with the happy, and at times shed tears with the bereaved. He never raised his voice. He would never touch money because he never had need of it and was not interested in it. He preferred every sort of simplicity** and liked to sit on the floor, but a couch had been forced upon him and this became his home for most of the twenty four hours of the day.[1] He would never, if he could help it, allow any preference to be shown to him. If any attachment to anything on earth could be said of him, it was surely to the Hill.[2] He loved it and said it was God itself.

Bhagavan was invariably kind to all animals. Snakes and scorpions were never allowed to be killed. For dogs he always had a tender spot. At one time a small puppy would always relieve itself near the office.The *sarvadhikari* got furious and tried to drive it out of the Ashram. Bhagavan came to its rescue saying that if some child did the same thing nobody would be angry, and the puppy was only a child and knew no better. He seemed specially to love monkeys and often said that in many ways they were better than human beings. He would often give directions that they

should be fed, and encouraged them in many ways to the annoyance of the management to whom they were a great nuisance. He also told us how, at times, people would reincarnate in the body of some animal just for a chance to be near him. There is, of course, the famous example of Lakshmi, the Ashram cow.[3]

Bhagavan was a very beautiful person; he shone with a visible light or aura. He had the most delicate hands I have ever seen with which alone he could express himself, one might almost say talk. His features were regular and the wonder of his eyes was famous. His forehead was high and the dome of his head the highest I have ever seen. His body was well-formed and of only medium height, but this was not apparent as his personality was so dominant that one looked upon him as tall. **He was always scrupulously clean and his body gave off a faint perfume, though he never used any scented soap.**

Bhagavan always radiated tremendous peace, but on those occasions when crowds were attracted to the Ashram such as *Jayanti* and *Deepam*,[4] this increased to an extraordinary degree. The numbers seem to call up some reserve of a hidden force, and it was a great experience to sit with him at such times.[5]

Bhagavan had a great sense of humour, and when talking a smile was never far from his face. He had many jokes in his repertoire and was a magnificent actor; he would always dramatize the protagonist of any story he related. When the recital was very pathetic he would be filled with emotion and could not proceed.[6]

On the question of attaining Self-realisation, Bhagavan told me that in the early stages a person who was regularly meditating would usually at first go into a trance which would probably last for some thirty minutes, and if he continued with his *tapas* properly, such *samadhi* would become more frequent. A person can still carry on with the ordinary day-to-day business but he no longer identifies himself with the activities, but watches them like a dreamer watching a dream.

While knowing Bhagavan's teaching, that all is only an appearance and a creation of mind, I found his teaching on dreams hard to understand and would often question him on the subject. The waking state seemed to me continuous, going on from day-to-day. I awoke into the same world each day whereas my dreams were always different, they were distinct. However, Bhagavan never accepted this distinction and repeated that the criticism only arose in the waking state and never in that of dreams. Then I myself had a dream:

I was having an argument with somebody on the subject of dreams and in the course of this I said, "Whatever you say, Bishop Berkeley was right, things are only in the mind, there is no reality outside that. Things do not exist; so dream and waking experience must be exactly the same. They are only mental concepts." "You say that now", the other replied, "but you would not talk like that in a dream." And then I woke up. The whole thing was intensely vivid.

Some people would fail to see how this applies to the above. But the point is that the dream was so real that I never questioned it to be anything but the waking state. The two were exactly the same.

Bhagavan said that the mind was like a monkey, never still for one second, it was an almost hopeless task to try and quieten it; the best thing to do was to give it a productive employment and never allow it to fritter itself away. Let it concentrate on 'Who am I'? And then there will be no room for any other thought.

Many people identified Bhagavan with Dakshinamurthi, the silent Guru,[7] who gave the instruction to four Kumaras in silence; because no word can express that which is beyond all words and no mind can grasp that which is beyond mind. How eloquent silence could be for the seeker can be illustrated by the following episode, which I witnessed personally.

A gentleman from Kashmir came to the Ashram with his assistant who could not speak a word of any other language except his native Kashmiri. One night when the Hall was almost dark except for the pale glimmer of a single hurricane lantern, the assistant came into the Hall and stood before Bhagavan in a respectful manner jabbering something rapidly in his language. Bhagavan said nothing but lay quietly gazing at him. After a while, the assistant saluted and left the Hall. Next morning his master came to Bhagavan and complained: Bhagavan, you never told me you could speak Kashmiri, was it fair? When Bhagavan asked how he thought so, he said: Last night my assistant came to you and asked several questions in his language. He tells me that you answered him in the same language and cleared all his doubts. "But I never opened my mouth", replied Bhagavan.

Bhagavan never initiated by touch. He always refused to place his hands on a person's head though very many besought him to do so. However, in one case he made an exception. An old *sannyasi*, who was an ex-stationmaster, came from Mysore. Bhagavan seemed from the first very sympathetic and unusually kind towards him. When he was leaving the Ashram,

he entered the Hall, which happened to be empty at the time. The *sannyasi* prayed to Bhagavan to place his hands on his head and knelt quite close to the couch, resting his head against it. Bhagavan turned towards him and placed both his hands on his head for a few minutes without saying anything. Then the *sannyasi* rose and left the Hall showing great emotion.

The Taylors, an American couple, came to the Ashram. Taylor was a retired postmaster. They became much attached to Bhagavan. One day, Mrs.Taylor suddenly said in the Hall, "Bhagavan, I want Self-realisation." "Wait", replied Bhagavan, "it will come in due time." "No", she answered, "that is no good. I want it here and now." Bhagavan tried to explain to her that when she was ready everything would work out all right. But she insisted: she must have it here and now and it was up to him to give it to her. Bhagavan said nothing but gazed at her steadily in the eyes for some minutes or so. She suddenly burst into tears and rushed out of the Hall, but would never tell anybody what had happened.[8]

One evening I asked permission to go to Pondicherry. Bhagavan asked, "Why?" I replied that I was having trouble with one of my teeth and wanted to consult the dentist. As he kept quiet, I did nothing. Later he asked me, "I thought you were going to Pondicherry, you are still here." "But you never gave me leave", I replied. Bhagavan kept quiet. It turned out that my trouble righted itself; something that had jammed against the gum became loose and there was no need for a dentist. A few months later I again had trouble, this time with another tooth. On asking permission and telling Bhagavan the reason why I wanted to go, he immediately said, "Yes, go." This time the journey did prove necessary.

Bhagavan said that the principal *sadhanas* we should practise were to eat only *sattvic* food and observe *satsanga.* He laid no other rules. He said that the mind was entirely created by the food we ate.

Bhagavan never taught morals, and had no special abhorrence to sex. He once said in answer to troubled disciples in my hearing, "It is better to do it than to be always thinking about it." This reminds one of the *Gita*, "Thoughts are acts in their infancy."

One day Bhagavan said, "Why do you think that you are the doer? It is absurd, as it is obvious that 'I' does nothing. 'I' is always the witness. Concentrate on being the witness and let things take their course, they will go on anyhow, you cannot prevent them."

Bhagavan was insistent on 'means' and taught that we should leave the 'ends' to look after themselves.

Bhagavan said, "Don't worry about what other people are doing

or saying, you have quite enough to do in worrying about yourself. First reform yourself and then it will be time enough to think about the world. How can you help the world until you have helped yourself?"

If asked about Self-realisation, what it was like, or what would be our state in future, he would always reply, "Why worry about something in future? It is here and now which are important. You are always Self-realised, but only ignorant of the fact."

Bhagavan was deeply interested in the construction of the shrine built on his mother's *samadhi.* He attended every function connected with it. At night, when no one was about, he would walk round and round the construction consecrating it. That he should take such a demonstrative part in anything has a very deep significance. It was extremely rare and has been doubted by many, but I myself was an eyewitness to these things and can vouch for their truth.

The philosophy of this greatest sage can be summed up in just three words, "There is nothing." So simple yet so supremely difficult. This entire world that we see, this mad rush of people after money and 'existence' is just a fabricless thought. We are like the shadow of a leaf cast by the moonlight, intangible and unsubstantial. You may justly turn to me and ask, "Who wants this purely negative state?" I can only reply, "It is just a question of taste."[9] But this being nothing, there must obviously be a state which is something. That state is Self-realisation. Not only it is something but it is *everything.*

An Australian journalist in the course of his visit to the Ashram, came to my room. It was obvious from the first moment that I was a tremendous problem to him. Why a European should shut himself away in a place like this was beyond his comprehension! He asked many questions but none of my replies satisfied him. At length he could not contain himself and bluntly asked me what I was doing here. I just said that here I found peace of mind. I know it was an inadequate answer but hoped it would stave off further enquiries. He looked at me seriously for a few minutes and then said pityingly, "Oh, I see, I have never been troubled in that way myself." All I had succeeded in doing was confirming his conviction that I was insane.

But let us return to the question and admit straightaway that even now I am unable to reply satisfactorily. I can only say, I came because I wanted to. And why do I stay? Because I want to. To my metal Bhagavan was a magnet and as yet his magnetism has lost none of its forces. I am helpless.

I see him sitting in the Hall completely detached, entirely unmoved by the happenings which seem so momentous to me, **his face wreathed in the most lovely of smiles, and an expression of serenity and beauty on it which is impossible to describe, or even believe unless you have seen it yourself.** No books written in the past, no stories of former saints can convey the same message: after all there is always the chance that they may have been frauds. But *this* is absolutely genuine and I am unable to doubt any longer even if I want to. Here we are on the bedrock of certainty in an ever-changing and uncertain world.

I doubt if we realise how lucky we are. One is inclined to get used to things and take them for granted. But there is no taking Bhagavan for granted, he is always surprisingly different, and that is one of the greatest wonders of his presence.

Extracts from his poems:

Surrender

I say that I have surrendered
But what have I given up?
It's easy to talk in this fashion
Though it's nothing but empty words,
Which came from the tongue too glibly
In a sentimental way.

* * *

It is all just show and pretending,
Prostrating and that sort of thing.
Quoting of texts and of *shastras,*
Perfect in word not in deed.
I'am sick, sick, sick of this business,
I want to start fresh but I can't.

* * *

Transmute me until I am blended
With you so that both are as One.
When there's no longer the talk of surrender
Then alone has surrender begun.

* * *

Will You Not Let Me Go?

Will you not let me go?
Here, in an alien land I pass my hours,
Far from my country and all former ties.
A restless longing slowly me devours
That me all wordly happiness denies.
And so, will you not let me go?

* * *

Will you not let me go?
I am a fool that I should try to flee;
For here, there is a peace I'll never find
When I the least am separate from Thee,
Then I'll be but a slave to caitiff mind.
And so, I do not wish to go.

* * *

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1. David Godman says: Sometime in 1928-29, Rangaswami Gounder brought a sofa and asked Bhagavan to sit on it. When Bhagavan refused, he started crying. For three successive days he was crying in the hall, begging Bhagavan to accept the gift. Finally, on the night of the third day, Bhagavan got off the bench (on which he had been sitting till then), and occupied the sofa. *Living By The Words Of Bhagavan*, p. 40.
2. *Refer* annexure-I, Mountain Arunachala, p. 410.
3. *Refer* annexure-IV, The Cow Lakshmi, p. 414.
4. *Refer* annexure-II for *Deepam* festival, p. 411.
5. Annamalai Swami also says: "Many devotees, including myself, felt that he radiated more than the usual amount of power and grace on *jayanti* days." *Living By The Words Of Bhagavan,* David Godman, p.77.
6. This, for example, happened when Sri Ramana was narrating a story from the *Periapuranam* to the devotees in the hall. *Refer* last three paras, p. 286.
7. *Refer* annexure-V, p. 415.
8. *Refer* paras 3 to 5 at p. 71 for a similar incident.
9. 'It is a question of taste', reminds us of a Hindi couplet, according to which: The lust and attachment to the world, renounced by saints and hugely sought after by fools, is the same as the dog eating with relish what a human being vomits.

43

Prof. K. Swaminathan (1896-1994) taught English at the Presidency College, Madras. He was the Chief Editor of the monumental 100-volume *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, and for some time edited *The Mountain Path.* He authored *Sri Ramana – The Self Supreme*, and for the National Book Trust he authored *Ramana Maharshi*. He translated into English verse Muruganar's 1282 stanzas of *Guruvachaka-Kovai* and 1851 verses of *Ramana Sannidhi Murai.* In his letters to the Ashram, he would address Sri Ramana as *Ammaiappa* – one who combines the attributes of mother and father, and sign as 'Ramana sei' – Ramana's child. He was awarded the Padma Bhushan in 1972.

I was told about Bhagavan in 1927, but then I was not interested in someone sitting still and doing nothing when so much was needed to be done to change this mad, bad world, and Mahatma Gandhi strode the land doing so many things 'socially relevant'. In 1940, I had many baffling problems and mental conflicts. Sir P.S.Sivaswami Iyer, my *pater familias* after my father's death, advised me to take a series of lessons on the *Brahma Sutras* from a great Sanskrit pandit in Bangalore. Then I could see that behind this apparent laziness of Bhagavan there was something very profound. And, that man said, this is not mere theory, you go to Tiruvannamalai and see for yourself.

As one deeply interested in poetry, I have read the poems of Muruganar [No.53] and said to myself, good heavens, the man who could inspire this kind of poetry is divine. It moved me completely; Muruganar completely converted me. Then, when Grant Duff [No.7] came to my college, I took him around. After I spent a week with him, he casually asked me, "Have you seen Ramana Maharshi?" I said to myself, here is an Englishman steeped in Italian philosophy telling me about the Maharshi. I felt ashamed, and I was ashamed. All these events convinced the obstinate camel that the oasis he badly needed was near and easy to reach.

When I told Sir Sivaswami about my decision to visit the Ashram, he said, you are a young man with many responsibilities; when you go to Bhagavan you will be swept off your feet and fall into an abyss. Don't go alone, tie yourself in many bonds; take somebody you like, you are attached to, to hold you. So I took my wife and two of my students with me.

The Maharshi deprived me of none of the persons or pleasures that were dear to me. He left them all with me enriched and sanctified. Shakespeare, Keats, Wordsworth and the Bible meant much more for me when illuminated by the light he shed on all he saw. From the *Bible* he often cited the key passages like: Be still and know that I am God; the kingdom of God is within you; my Father and I are one.

My first *darshan* of the Maharshi on September 29, 1940, was the most memorable event of my life. The last *darshan* occurred a fortnight before his *mahanirvana* on April 14, 1950. In between, during many weekends and college vacations, repeated visits to the Ashram kept me (as spells of sound sleep keep one) in health, happiness and taut efficiency. **The pure happiness I enjoyed was that of a child when it sits securely in its mother's lap.**

Bhagavan was a perfect Impersonality, like the sun in the sky or like unnoticed daylight in an inner chamber. This impersonal being would suddenly become a Person full of *sattvic* power, highly human, charming, mother-like, who could communicate with sharp precision his own Awareness Bliss to other persons according to their needs and moods. The sun now came down and played with us as the light of the moon to illuminate the mind, or as the fire in the home to cook our food.

Bhagavan listened like a child to passages from Shakespeare's plays and Keats' letters and quickly and convincingly revealed the universal truth in each flower unique in its own beauty. On Keats' letter on 'negative capability' his passing comment was: "So there are Upanishads in English as in Sanskrit." After a passage from Shakespeare was read, discussed and duly praised, Bhagavan said, "Shakespeare the Self enjoyed writing this, so that, born again as we, he might enjoy reading it." No wonder then that Bhagavan not only permitted and encouraged Muruganar in his copious outpourings but also often joined him in playing the grand game of rhyming and chiming in words that double a common joy. Was he not the sole begetter of thousands of marvellous poems by Muruganar and so many others?

Bhagavan often equated Gandhi with Hanuman, the humble and heoric servant of Sri Rama. He once said: We say that Hanuman is *chiranjivi* (immortal). It does not mean that a certain monkey goes on living forever and ever. It only means that there will always be on earth someone who serves Rama as your Gandhi does now.

Once Rangachari, a Telugu teacher in a Vellore college, asked the

Maharshi to explain *nishkama karma* (desireless action). There was no reply. After a time, the Maharshi went up the hill followed by a few devotees and Rangachari. There was a thick, strong, thorny branch lying on the way which the Maharshi picked up and began working on. The spikes were cut off, the knots made smooth and the surface polished with a rough leaf. Hours of hard and careful work resulted in a nice stick that Maharshi presented to a passing shepherd boy who appeared dejected because he had lost his stick. Rangachari confessed that he had learnt a new lesson in the art of teaching, for this silent practical demonstration was the Sage's perfect answer to his earnest question.

In one article the famous Swiss psychologist Carl Jung contrasted Sri Ramakrishna and Sri Bhagavan and saw in this succession the progressive advance from *bhakti* to *jnana.* On hearing this, Bhagavan promptly sat erect and protested against the comparison, saying: When one has reached the mountain-top, no matter from which side and by which path, one knows and understands all other paths. What is there that Sri Ramakrishna did not know?

In a like manner he deprecated comparison by some devotees between himself as a *jnani* and Mahatma Gandhi as a *karma-yogi*. The eye that sees and the hand that works are like organs of one and the same Eternal Goodness. Bhagavan saw only *adhyatma sakti* (the Supreme power) working everywhere. Different persons perform different functions; arranging them in an order of merit is 'the mischief of the ego'.

Sri Bhagavan preferred to speak in Tamil, Telugu or Malayalam. But he corrected mistranslations in English. He used the phrase, 'automatic divine activity' while explaining *prarabdha* through the analogy of the electric fan which goes on getting slow before it finally stops. And he added smilingly, "But you can stop it straightaway with a stick if you want."

Despite the Maharshi's profound reverence for and frequent reference to the gods, his predominant concern was with impersonal *jnana.* He also maintained strict silence on irrelevant, speculative issues like the nature of God. This brings him close to the Buddha. **In his technique of self-enquiry, the exploration of consciousness, which gives energy and meaning to the whole human life and breaks down the barriers between sacred and secular, he resembles the scientist.**

The experience of the peace conferred by the Maharshi's presence, testified to by so many devotees, accords with his reply to a visitor who asked which of the many spiritual teachers he should follow: "Choose that guru from whom you get *santi* (peace)." The Maharshi was fond of the story of Tattvaraya who composed a *bharani* in honour of his

guru and invited an assembly of learned men to hear him.The pandits raised the objection that a *bharani* could be sung only in honour of a warrior who had killed a thousand elephants and certainly not in honour of a mere ascetic. Then the poet said, "Let us all go to my guru and settle the matter in his presence." They went to the guru and the poet reported the pandits' objection. The guru sat silent and so did all others. Thus days passed, with no thought at all occuring to any of them. At the end of the long, silent session the guru made a slight movement of his mind and the assembly declared with one voice: "Vanquishing a thousand elephants is nothing before this man's power to quell the rutting elephants of our egos." And they called upon Tattvaraya to proceed to read his *bharani.*

Bhagavan's special mission was to convince all and sundry that by self-enquiry, 'Who am I?' (his *brahmastra),* and self-surrender, anyone of us can and should live securely, comfortably and happily in both worlds, the Timeless and time.

Bhagavan succeeded in being a *friend* of every one – saint or sinner, prince or peasant, learned or ignorant, cow, dog or monkey. J.C.Molony, I.C.S. (a district collector) has noted how his hound preferred the hermit's company to his own. He records: After visiting the sage on the hill, when I reached my camp, one of my dogs was missing. In the evening arrived the holy man leading the truant on a string. The sage said, "He came back to me, and I should have liked to keep him. But why should I steal him from you?"

Women and *harijans* were no less welcome to his charmed circle. Bhagavan gave freedom to all to enjoy his *saameepya* (proximity, nearness), and his *soulabhya* (easy accessibility).

Once in the 1940s, I was sitting outside the hall with many devotees. Bhagavan was reclining on a couch. A group of learned pandits was discussing passages from the Upanishads with great enthusiasm and profundity. All, including Bhagavan, appeared to be attentively listening to the interesting discussion when, all of a sudden, Bhagavan rose from the couch, walked some distance and stood before a villager who was standing looking lowly with palms joined. All eyes turned to Bhagavan and the villager who was standing at a distance. They appeared to be conversing. Soon Bhagavan returned to his couch and the discussion was resumed.

Being curious to know why Bhagavan had to go out to meet a villager, I slipped away from the discussion and caught up with the villager before he left the Ashram. He told me that Bhagavan was asking why I was standing so far and also asked my name, about my village, what I did,

and about my family etc. I enquired, "Did you ask him anything?" The villager replied, "When I asked him how I could earn his blessings, he asked whether there was a temple in my village and the name of the temple deity. When I told him the deity's name, he said, go on repeating the name of the deity and you would receive all the blessings needed."

I came back to Bhagavan's presence, but lost all interest in the discussions. I felt that the simple humility and devotion of a peasant had evoked a far greater response from our Master than any amount of learning. I then decided that though a scholar by profession, I should always remain a humble, ignorant peasant at heart and pray for Bhagavan's grace and blessings.

Extracts from his poems:

Sri Ramana – the Self Supreme

You are the Perfect, One praised of old
The Gita's *Jnani,* the *Jivanmukta*
of 'The Crest Jewel of Discrimination'
Inactive Doer of all deeds done
Wishing no wish and taking no side
Contemplative witness of things that pass
Steadily established in *Satchidananda*
Nothing topical, temporal, novel
No noise, no struggle and no change
The pole star, Truth, forever the same.

* * *

Steep uphill is the way You have taken
To the shining mountain-top of truth
Steep, yet short and straight and clear
Free from darkness, confusion and peril.

* * *

Rock of faith, O Dawn of Hope,
Child of Charity, Holy Sage,
O Silent Presence on the Mount,
O Tiger bright with burning eyes!
You sought us, and you have caught us;

Forsake us not; consume us quite;
Sri Ramana of Aruna.

* * *

44

Rangan (Velacheri Ranga Iyer) was a classmate of Sri Ramana.

In June 1907, I saw Bhagavan for the first time since we were at school together. I asked, "Do you recognise me?" Bhagavan uttered 'Rangan' with difficulty. In those days he spoke little and found it difficult to use his voice. My mother had already told me about her first visit in the late 1890s when Bhagavan was residing in a temple on a mound near the main Arunachaleswara Temple,[1] Tiruvannamalai.

Many years later, talking to me about my mother's visit, Bhagavan said, "When your mother came to see me, she was frightened by my ascetic appearance and attire. My hair was all matted and my body was completely covered with dust." He added that at that time he was never aware of the passage of time. Sometimes, when he tried to stand up, his head would reel and he would lose his balance. When this happened he concluded that he must have spent many days in a state in which he had not been conscious of the world. Apart from these periodic bouts of weakness he had no other way of detecting the passage of time. When asked whether he had any food in those days, he replied, " When there is no consciousness of the body, the bodily functions are also suspended."

At the time of my departure after the first visit, I told Bhagavan, "You have reached great heights." His reply was, "The far off mountains look even and smooth." I felt that he was telling me that one could become a *jnani* even while living an ordinary householder's life. He seemed to be telling me that there was nothing special or great in physical renunciation.

The next time I met Bhagavan, I was on my way to Madras in search of a job. My financial circumstances were in a bad state at the time. Bhagavan seemed to know this even though I never mentioned the subject. My attempts for a job being unsuccessful, I returned ḥome via Tiruvannamalai. As soon as I saw Bhagavan, he brought up the subject of my financial problems. That night when I was lying, Bhagavan came and sat next to me. I got up and sat by his side. "Rangan", he asked, "Are you worried about the financial difficulties? Will ten thousand rupees be enough

for you?" Eventually, I got a job in an automobile company, selling buses. Since I got a commission on each bus sold, I was able to raise the Rs.10,000 that Bhagavan had spoken about. This money was enough to pay off my debts and to perform marriages of two of my daughters.

Living with Bhagavan induced a spirit of renunciation in many, including myself, but Bhagavan always discouraged his devotees from taking the final steps of physical renunciation. My urge to take *sannyasa* subsided and eventually disappeared.

There were many occasions when I needed help and I soon got into the habit of telling Bhagavan all about my family troubles on my visits to the Skandasram. On one occasion he turned to me and said, "You think that your own troubles are very great. What do you know of my troubles? Let me tell you about one incident.

Once, while climbing a steep part of the mountain, I was holding on to a rock to keep my balance. The rock was loose and would not take my weight. I fell back and was partly buried by a small avalanche of stones. I managed to remove them but found my left thumb dislocated. It was hanging loosely near the finger. I pushed back the thumb into its socket." Bhagavan's mother told me that she could not bear to recall that accident. He came home bleeding all over.

I got on very well with Bhagavan's mother because we had known each other when she lived in Madurai. On one occasion she told me, "One day when I was looking steadily at Bhagavan, his body gradually disappeared and in its place I saw the *lingam*. The *lingam* was very bright. I could not believe my eyes. I rubbed my eyes but I still saw the same, bright *lingam*. I was frightened because I thought my son was leaving us forever. Fortunately, the *lingam* gradually transformed itself into Bhagavan's body." After hearing her account I looked at Bhagavan for confirmation or comment, but he just smiled and said nothing.

When my son was writing a book called *Bhagavan Parinayam* (The marriage of Bhagavan) in which Bhagavan marries *jnana kanya* (the bride *jnana*), I had told him about the incident and he incorporated it in his manuscript. A few months later, when my son read out his book before Bhagavan, he was asked how he knew about the incident. "My father told me", replied my son. 'Oh!'Said Bhagavan, "Did he really tell you all about that?" The other devotees were curious to know more about the incident because none of them had heard about it, but Bhagavan said, "It was nothing," and diverted their attention to something else.

Once, I went out of the Skandasram for a short period of time, leaving Bhagavan sleeping inside. When I returned, I saw him sitting outside on a bed. I thought nothing of it until I went inside the ashram and saw Bhagavan was sleeping inside, in the position I had seen him when I left the ashram. When I told Bhagavan about this later, he smiled and said, "Why did you not tell me then itself? I could have caught the thief!"

This was typical of Bhagavan's response to the supernatural. If such events were reported to him, he would either ignore them or pass them off as a joke. This was because he didn't want any of his devotees to be sidetracked from their main goal of realising the Self into an unproductive interest in miraculous phenomena.

Although Bhagavan preferred to keep his exalted state a secret from the public, he would occasionally show us glimpses of his power and knowledge. Once, for example, a devotee, who was sitting at a distance from Bhagavan, copying some Sanskrit verses, had a doubt about what he should write. Bhagavan, without even being asked, called over to him and cleared his doubt; but he rarely showed his omniscience so openly.

I witnessed another manifestation of Bhagavan's power on one of my visits to the Skandasram. Two men came from a village and asked Bhagavan to give them *vibhuti* with his own hand. They refused to collect the *vibhuti* from the place where it was kept, even when told by Bhagavan to do so, and eventually left disappointed. I followed them and asked, "Why did you want the *vibhuti* from Bhagavan's own hands? Why were you so insistent?"One of them told me, "I used to have leprosy. I once came to see Bhagavan and he gave me some *vibhuti* with his own hand. I applied it to my body and soon there were no signs of the disease. This is my friend. He also has leprosy. That is why I ask for *vibhuti* from Bhagavan's hands." Bhagavan must have known that he had inadvertently cured the leper of his disease. He probably refused to repeat it because he didn't want to acquire reputation as a 'miracle man'.

Because my brothers and I had received so much benefit from being in Bhagavan's presence, we made it a point to encourage other people to go to Tiruvannamalai and have Bhagavan's *darshan.* A friend of ours, who went to see Bhagavan at our behest, on his return told us, "What a useless swami you sent me to! On an *ekadasi* day he was cutting onions."

Once Bhagavan told me, "You and your brothers have broadcast the news that there is a Maharshi here. Some people believe you until they come here and see me sitting in a corner. Then they think, oh, is this the man? They get disappointed and go away cursing you."

Although Bhagavan managed to maintain a façade of ordinariness, he was able to see the spiritual worth of everyone who came to see him, and would not let himself be understood by the undeserving.

Bhagavan could recognise spiritual maturity in the people around him. He could also discern it in the animals that came to him. One day, Bhagavan's mother asked, "Why does that dog always like to stay in your lap?" Bhagavan turned to me and said, "This dog is always in unwavering *samadhi*. A great soul has come in the form of a dog. Mother does not know this."

That Bhagavan had ceased to identify with his body was clear to me when he and I were walking on the forest path around the mountain. Having stepped on a thorn, I was lagging behind. Bhagavan stopped, came back to me and removed the thorn. Later, Bhagavan stepped on a big thorn. Lifting his foot, I was astonished to find many thorns sticking out of it; some were old and some were new. I lifted the other foot and found the same. "Which thorns will you remove?" asked Bhagavan with a laugh. Then he crushed the protruding thorn with the foot in which it was embedded and happily continued to walk.

I felt that I was not making much spiritual progress, so I once asked Bhagavan, "How many times will I have to be born to get *jnana*?" Bhagavan answered, "There are no factors like time and distance. In one hour we dream that many days and years have passed by. Don't you see in a cinema film mere shadows being transformed into great seas, mountains and buildings. The world is not outside you. The small world that is in the mind appears as a big world outside. The annihilation of the mind is *jnana*."

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1. *Refer* annexure – I, p. 410.

45

M. Sivaprakasam Pillai (1875-1948), a graduate in philosophy, an officer in the Revenue Dept. of the South Arcot Collectorate, first met Sri Ramana in 1902. He is best remembered for his role in getting Sri Ramana write down his teachings on Self-enquiry, later published as *Who am I?* Pillai's experiences and feelings about the Maharshi in his verse biography *Sri Ramana Charita Ahaval*, published in 1923, are sampled below in prose form.

Even though the people who approach you with restless and tired minds are sinners without devotion, like a mother who comforts her child on seeing its suffering, you melt with love, comfort their disconsolate minds

with eyes full of compassion. You become the father and mother of all those who approach you. You give them food, generate knowledge in them and in this way destroy their misery.

With kind words you said, "The meaning of the word 'I' is the one reality that exists as supreme bliss, as knowledge. It is indestructible, and although it is within this fleshly body, it is still different from it. If you desire to know this supreme essence, you must first get rid of the attachment that takes the body as 'I' and then enquire, Who am I? If one repeatedly dives within [like the pearl diver searching for the pearl] one can know oneself. This Self-knowledge is liberation."

I had a vision while sitting before you [on May 5, 1913]. All around you I saw an incomparable effulgence like the splendour of many full moons. Your divine body shone with light of the sun, belittling the lustre of shining gold. Your beautiful eyes were shedding divine grace. In you was the majesty of the Lord of Lords, along with the power of giving bountifully. A little later I saw your whole body smeared with white, bright, sacred ash. My stone-like heart melted and became like water. I saw these visions, but those near me did not see them. I did not ask you about them, nor did you speak to me about them. From the day I realised that you are my Lord, and all the dangers and difficulties I encountered disappeared by your grace like mist disappearing before the sun.

The Supreme Lord has assumed a human body as an act of grace and resides at Arunachala under the name Ramana. Ramanadeva, if people in the world say that you too are a human being like us, that is the same as describing dense, rain-filled clouds as mere smoke cloud.[1]

Is it possible for my one mouth to describe your glories? No one is capable of describing your glories unless you yourself reveal them through your grace. You have raised me as your devotee. Somehow, please do not throw me away on account of my unworthiness. Ramanadeva, kindly make me submissive to you.

Ramana *Sadguru*, Supreme Self! Like a deer trapped in a net, not knowing the way to escape, I fall at your feet again, saying, "Your feet alone are my refuge." By answering, "There is no need to get agitated," you freed me from fear and saved me. In this way you became my Lord, my father and my mother.

About Pillai, Michael James (www.happiness of being.com) says:

In his poems he repeatedly prays for the Grace of Bhagavan expressing his own inability to follow the *upadesa* given by Him. When a

devotee asked Sri Bhagavan, "Sivaprakasam Pillai, who is such an ardent devotee and a long-standing disciple, has written that Bhagavan's instructions could not be carried out by him effectively in practice, what would be the lot of others then?"

Bhagavan replied, "Adi Sankara also says similar things when he composes songs in praise of any deity. How else can they praise God? If one adopts the *jivabhava* (the attitude of being an individual soul) and praises God, one cannot but sing of the limitations and shortcomings of one's individual existence."[2] This can be seen from the hymns sung by Bhagavan himself in praise of Arunachala.[3]

On Pillai's death, a telegram was sent to Bhagavan conveying the news. After seeing the telegram Bhagavan said in Tamil, "Siva prakasam Sivaprakasamanar", that is, Sivaprakasam has become Siva-Prakasam, the light of Siva.

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1. A rain cloud and smoke cloud may look similar, but only the rain cloud can give rain.
2. *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi,* Talk no. 630.
3. A 108-verse poem addressed to the mountain Arunachala. For details *refer* Glossary / Books, p. 425.

46

Akhilandamma, born in 1887, was 'married' at the age of five. Her husband died two years later. As per the then social custom, 'remarriage' not being possible, she decided to devote her life to serving *sadhus*. In 1903, she visited Sri Ramana on the hill and felt his power. She served food to him for four decades.

In 1903, while wandering near the hill for gathering flowers, I saw many people walking towards the Sadguru Swami Cave. A person from the crowd told me, "There is one Brahmana Swami there who sits motionless." These words kindled in me a desire to see him. I bought a little sugar candy as a token offering and went to see him. What a sight he was! For the first time I saw the magnetic Lord who draws towards him the minds of those who see him. Even though he was unwashed and covered with dust, his body glowed like gold.

When I went for *darshan* again, Bhagavan was sitting inside the Virupaksha Cave. On seeing Bhagavan my mind flowed towards him with uninterrupted, boundless love, but along with this emotion there was a sort of inexpressible regard and fear. It is only natural for people to feel a sense of awe and reverence while they are near Bhagavan. **It is also natural for the individual self to subside in his presence. There was a gracious power that prevailed in that holy place. It numbed the mind, the power of speech and the body so effectively that the visitors were automatically silenced.** There were no rules about silence, but in that holy presence casual visitors who had come for *darshan* would automatically remain calm and quiet.

When Bhagavan first moved to the Skandasram, no cooking was done there. Bhagavan and the devotees depended upon the food offerings brought everyday. Kamakshi Ammal and myself often used to take food to the ashram. One day, five or six heads of various *maths* came unexpectedly to the ashram to have Bhagavan's *darshan.* Since we had not known about this in advance, the food was falling short. When it was time to eat, a devotee approached Bhagavan and said, "They are all waiting, may we take food?" Bhagavan who knew about the shortage, replied, "Let us wait a while." Sometime later, a group of people unexpectedly came, bringing with them big vessels full of food. Bhagavan asked them to first serve the food to everyone who was present. Only then did he stand up to indicate that he was ready to eat.

Once I went to the Skandasram with fruits and milk. But Bhagavan's mother was unwilling to have the stuff brought by a non-Brahmin. Bhagavan who understood his mother's mind said to her, "All right, it is better that you go back to your house in Madurai." He then ate some of the offering and gave some to his attendant, who returned what remained to me as Bhagavan's *prasad.*

One day when I went up the hill with all the required foodstuff to serve a *bhiksha,* a swami told me, since it was a full moon day, it was an auspicious time to receive *upadesa* from great souls. I approached Bhagavan, bowed, stood up and said, " Bhagavan, kindly tell me something." Bhagavan stared at me and asked, "About what am I to tell you?"I was both puzzled and nonplussed. A mixture of fear and devotion along with an eagerness to hear Bhagavan's gracious words welled up within me, rendering me incapable of speech. I just stood mutely. Bhagavan understood my predicament. No one can hide anything from him. He can understand the state of mind of anyone who approaches him, merely by looking at

him. He looked at me graciously and said, '*unnai vidamal iru*', that is, 'Be without leaving yourself.'

I could not comprehend the meaning of this high-level *upadesa*, but as soon as the words came from Bhagavan's mouth I felt an immense satisfaction and wonderful effulgence in my mind. These gracious words welled up in my mind again and again like the rising of tides.The feeling they produced gave me an indescribable happiness. I stood there delighting myself in the feelings produced by this one phrase. Even today, the sound of that *upadesa* rings in my ears and bestows immense peace on me.

Though I didn't understand what Bhagavan had told, I immediately experienced the state that the words were indicating without ever really understanding what they meant. I came to understand through this experience that in Bhagavan's benign presence a single gracious utterance can produce the fruit and the fulfilment of all spiritual practices such as *sravana* [hearing], *manana* [thinking or reflection] and *nididhyasa* [contemplation or abidance].

In Bhagavan's last days, while I was staying at my village, I was frequently thinking and worrying about his health. I went to the Ashram but was prevented from entering the gate as thousands were waiting to have his *darshan.* By Bhagavan's grace an inmate of the Ashram who knew me somehow came to the place and informed Bhagavan that I had arrived. I was given permission to have *darshan*.

I tried to suppress my emotion but the feeling that I would soon be losing my one and only God completely destroyed my self-restraint. I cried out to him: "Bhagavan! Bhagavan has decided to give up this body. What can I do?" After I left the room, Bhagavan sent me the following message via the devotee who had opened the door for me: "Why do you feel sorry for this mortal body?" It occurred to me that Bhagavan was consoling me by saying: Don't feel worry about this body, I am always your saviour!

47

Sadhu Natanananda (Natesa Mudaliar) (1898-1981) was a scholar. His dialogues with Sri Ramana are contained in *Upadesa Manjari* (Tamil). He authored *Sri Ramana Darsanam.*

In 1917-18, I was a schoolmaster. Being of a pious disposition, I

used to go about from place to place frequently to have *darshan* of the deities in temples. A noble soul who saw this brought to me, of his own accord, two books in Tamil, namely, *Sri Ramakrishna Vijayam* and *Vivekananda Vijayam*. After reading them, I was seized with an intense longing for getting God's vision and for finding a guru to show me the way. At this juncture, I heard about the extraordinary greatness of Bhagavan, whom I met in May 1918 for the first time at the Skandasram.

I beseeched him fervently saying, "It is my great desire that I should actually experience your gracious wisdom. Kindly fulfil my desire." In those days Sri Ramana was not speaking much. Still he spoke kindly as follows, "Is it the body in front of me that desires to obtain my grace? Or is it the awareness within it? If it is the awareness, is it not now looking upon itself as the body and making this request? If so, let the awareness first of all know its real nature. It will then automatically know God and my grace. All that you have to do hereafter is that you do not identify yourself with the body, the senses and the mind. You have to convert the state of ignorant deep sleep in which one becomes formless and unattached, into conscious deep sleep. You should never forget that this experience will come only through long practice. This experience will make it clear that your real nature is not different from the nature of God."

Bhagavan never used to prescribe discipline for any one. His nature was to instruct by following himself the discipline of conduct enjoined upon spiritual aspirants. When someone complained that Bhagavan was not censuring the conduct of some devotees, he said, "Who is to correct whom? Is it not the Lord alone who has the authority to correct everyone? All we can do is to correct ourselves. That itself is correcting others."

Although Sri Ramana was adored by his devotees as Bhagavan, the Maharshi, and by some as a divine incarnation, to others he showed himself as an ordinary person. However, to see his external form was itself adequate to experience the bliss of peace. Not only was he aware of his own real nature, he clearly knew the truth of others. Even when he was in the midst of thousands of devotees, he always remained steadfast in the awareness of the Supreme Self, without swerving in the least from his state.

Even though Sri Ramana indicated the truth by ever abiding in the Self, he has, at the same time appeared to many in their visions as God incarnate. The story of a Polish lady who came all the way for Bhagavan's *darshan* should serve as an example:

The lady once went alone to see the Skandasram. On her return she started feeling very thirsty. Not finding any way of quenching her thirst, she began to think, "If it is true that Bhagavan is the omnipotent, universal Self, why can't he appear here and remove my thirst?" The next moment Sri Bhagavan appeared with water in his water pot and satisfied her thirst. When this took place Bhagavan was sitting in the Ashram in his usual place, completely unaware of the drama that was unfolding on the hill.

The Polish lady, who had both pure love and devotion, was a devout Christian who had the tendency of only believing that a person was Christ-like if he exhibited supernatural powers. The supremely compassionate Bhagavan, caught by devotion, appeared before her in conformity with her belief and fulfilled her wish.

Although incidents like these are a great help in increasing and intensifying the devotion and faith of devotees, Bhagavan always discouraged people from deliberately trying to produce such phenomena.

Bhagavan used to say, just as air, which is blemishless by its nature, has foul or good odour by virtue of what it associates with, association with the wise is the means for effecting transformation. Realising this truth, some devotees used to tell Bhagavan that the tranquility of mood experienced effortlessly in his presence could not be obtained elsewhere even by great effort. Bhagavan would say: Yes, Yes, just as the mother of pearl converts the raindrop it receives into pearl, the mature ones are redeemed by the divine look of the *sadguru* as his grace. But the immature ones, despite staying in guru's presence even for a long time, do not realise anything. They are like a donkey that carries precious camphor without being aware of its value. The impure minds are not able to obtain the benefit of the guru's grace.

Bhagavan took special interest in the spiritual welfare of the devotees spending their time serving him with the belief that service to Guru is the best form of *tapas*. Bhagavan would exhort devotees to try to attend to the Self all the time. He told a gentleman from the West who was sweeping up the leaf-plates that were lying near the dining room: "Is sweeping the used leaf-plates the means to get salvation? Is it to perform this *tapas* that you came here all the way? Go inside. The service of purifying your heart is the highest service. That alone can redeem you."

A certain lady would prostrate to Bhagavan, touch his feet and then put the hands that had touched Bhagavan's feet on her eyes. After noticing that she did this daily, Bhagavan told her one day, "The pure awareness, which is shining as the inward illumination is guru's gracious

feet. The contact with these [inner holy feet] alone can give you true redemption."

Some of those who came for the Maharshi's *darshan* used to perform *ashtanga namaskaram.* Bhagavan, addressing one such devotee said, "The benefit of performing *namaskaram* to the guru is only the removal of the ego. Self realisation cannot be attained by bowing of the body, but only by bowing of the ego".

In August 1938, Rajendra Prasad (later first President of India) along with Jamana Lal Bajaj,[1] visited the Ashram. [*See* photograph no. 17 in the book.] When taking leave of Bhagavan, the latter said, "Mahatmaji has sent me here. Is there any message that I can take to him?" Bhagavan replied, "What message is needed when heart speaks to heart? The same *sakti* (Superpower) that is working here is also working there."

Sarojini Naidu[2] after having *darshan* of Bhagavan said, "There are two great persons living in our midst today. One of them never permits anyone to keep quiet even for a minute. The other does not allow anyone to raise one's 'I' even for a moment." This concise statement indicates the Mahatma's life of self-sacrifice devoid of 'mine' and the Maharshi's life of *jnana* devoid of 'I'(ego).

Almost everyone who approached Bhagavan wanted to get some special *upadesa* from him. To one such seeker, Bhagavan said, "*Jnana* is given neither from outside nor from another person. It can be realised by everyone in his own heart. Since the meaning of the word *upadesa* (*upa+desam)* is only 'being in the Self' or 'being as the Self', so long as one is seeking the Self from outside, Self realisation cannot be attained."

Although this was the normal stance adopted most of the time, as an exception, Bhagavan once imparted a mantra to a *harijan* devotee, who was worshipping Bhagavan with great devotion and used to have his *darshan* everyday from a distance in conformity with the prevailing social custom. Bhagavan, who had noticed this for many days asked him one day to come near. Melting with great compassion because of his wonderful devotion, Bhagavan gave him a gracious look and told him, "Always keep meditating Siva, Siva. Never forget this even in your dreams. This itself will make you blessed."

Once Bhagavan was putting together the proof pages of an Ashram publication to make them into a book. A rich devotee felt that the effort was unnecessary and said, "When I come next week I shall bring a new bound copy of the book." Bhagavan replied with a smile, "Why is that necessary? What we need is only the contents, which will be the same in the book and these pages."

On one occasion, a maharaja came for Bhagavan's *darshan*. When he was leaving, a resident devotee followed him in the hope of getting a donation for the Ashram. Bhagavan did not approve of this and said, "To a *sannyasi* even a king is mere straw," and illustrated it by recounting a story : A Muslim saint, learning that Emperor Akbar very much liked to associate with *sadhus*, went to the palace to obtain a favour for his devotees. He saw Akbar in prayer, asking favours from God. Immediately he left the palace.When Akbar heard of the saint's visit, he called him and asked why he left without seeing him.The saint replied, "To fulfil a small need of my devotees I thought of approaching you. But I found that you yourself have needs and were praying to God for their fulfilment. As the scene reminded me the truth that God alone can fulfil everyone's needs, I left the palace."

One night in 1924, some thieves came to the Ashram and were breaking windows to get inside. Bhagavan told them: Why are you taking trouble to enter the room, we will open the door for you to take whatever you want. And he then had the door opened. Despite this, the thieves physically abused Bhagavan. A devotee who could not bear this wanted to retaliate. Bhagavan intervened and said, "Patience! Patience! What kind of action is this? They are thieves. They have taken theft as their profession. To achieve their end, they are prepared to do whatever is necessary. If we *sadhus* also repeat the evil acts of those who do not pay attention to right and wrong, what then is the difference between them and us?" By such judicious advice he pacified the devotee, and said that *sadhus* should under no circumstance slip from their *sannyasa dharma*.[3]

Towards the end of Bhagavan's life, a devotee who firmly believed in the omnipotence of the great ones, could not bear to see the Maharshi weak because of the disease. He appealed to the Maharshi with great feeling that he should transfer the disease to him and stay in the body for some more time to save many other helpless devotees. Wondering at the devotee's childlike innocence, Bhagavan looked at him with compassion and replied graciously, "Who created this disease? Is it not He alone who has the freedom to change it? Is it not enough that I have borne till today all by myself this load of flesh that [once it is dead] must be carried by four persons? Should I continue bearing it henceforth?" Through these words he made it clear that in the physical world the law of destiny was inexorable. The *jnani* merely remains as a witness established in his natural state.

Bhagavan was never tired of telling the devotees that he was not the body and that they should not identify him with a physical form. A well-known incident illustrates this. A devotee came for Bhagavan's *darshan* for the first time. Bhagavan was not in his usual seat and was engaged in some activity. Not knowing that he was Bhagavan, the devotee asked, "Where is Ramana?" Immediately, Sri Ramana replied with a smile, "Ramana? See, he is here", and pointed out to a brass vessel on which the name Ramana had been engraved. When Bhagavan saw that the newcomer was puzzled by the remark, he pointed respectively to his body and the vessel and explained, "This is also a form like the vessel. At least the name Ramana is on that. Even that is not here." Then he resumed his activity.

Bhagavan's non-identification with the body was witnessed by those who saw him in the last few months of his life, when he was affected by cancer. He remained indifferent to the treatment arranged by devotees and allowed the doctors to do their job as wished by the devotees. He said, "Our job is to remain a witness to all that happens," and added, "Thinking this body alone to be Bhagavan, they are grieved that Bhagavan is suffering because of illness. What to do? They are worried that Swami is going to leave. Where to go? How to go?"

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1. He was treasurer of the Indian National Congress. Gandhiji shifted his ashram from Sabarmati to Wardha at his instance. He once mentioned to a close relation of the Compiler-Editor that all questions formulated by him somehow got answered even before they were put to the Maharshi.
2. She was deeply involved in the freedom struggle of India and was a member of the Congress Working Committee. A well-known poetess, she was referred to as the Nightingale of india.
3. The duty of a person who has renounced the world.

48

Prof. N.R. Krishnamurti Aiyer (1898-1994) taught physics for 33 years at the American College, Madurai. He was a regular visitor to the Ashram in the 1920s, 30s and 40s. He authored *The Essence of Ribhu Gita.*

In April 1914, on their way to Tirupati my parents went to see Bhagavan at the Virupaksha Cave. When I made my obeisance to Bhagavan along with everyone else, his benign and divine gaze was fixed

upon me, but I paid little attention to him as I ran about the place along with other boys. After my return home a great change came over me. Till then I had never cared to go to any temple, but now I felt dragged, as it were, by some mysterious fascination to the huge and magnificent Mathrubhuteswara Lingam in the rock temple in my town Tiruchirapalli. Once inside the temple, a great peace overwhelmed me and the joy I felt was indescribable.

In January 1919, when I had an occasion to visit my sister's house in Tiruvannamalai, I had Bhagavan's *darshan* at the Skandasram. This time also, Bhagavan's gracious look was impressed upon me. Reaching home, when I slept after breakfast, for over two hours I was fully conscious, but at the same time totally unconscious of my body and surroundings. Even after being roused for lunch, I felt that everything around me was like a dream. The people who saw my puzzled expression made fun of me.

In 1923, at the end of the first year of my teaching career, I again visited my sister in Tiruvannamalai and went to the Ashram. At that time I was very sympathetic towards people like Ganapati Muni [No.91], who were working for the political uplift of India. I also felt anger towards people like Bhagavan who were not lifting a finger for the country's liberation. I was then an agnostic. I said nature could take care of itself. Where is the need for a creator?

At that time, there were no buildings in the Ashram except for a shed covering the mother's *samadhi*. I saw Bhagavan seated on a bench under a tree, stroking a dog near him. Among us Brahmins, the dog is an animal which will defile purity. A good part of my respect for the Maharshi was gone. I asked him, Sir, you are sitting like this, what is your next *sthiti* (move)?

My idea was to elicit from him the reply that there is a soul that survives the dissolution of the body, which later gets unified with God. I wanted to have a verbal fight with him so that I could prove that this was not so. Minutes passed but no reply was forthcoming. I said to myself, "Is this man taking shelter under his dumb-indifferent silence from answering an inconvenient question?" Just then Bhagavan's ringing voice exploded, "*Sthiti*, what do you mean by *sthiti*?"

I was not prepared for the question. I said to myself, "Oho, this man is very dangerous, he is dangerously alive. I have to answer with proper care." I began to think: If I ask him about the body, it is a useless question; the body will be buried or burnt. Now, if I say that the question is

about the state of mind, he will naturally ask me to define mind, for which no answer was forthcoming within me. I landed in a void, and was like a helpless mute. There was a fierce glow in Bhagavan's eyes that held my own eyes in a tight grip. I lost awareness of both the body and the world. I do not know how long it continued. When I came to myself, I was terribly afraid of the Maharshi. In spite of myself, I prostrated and made a headlong flight.

At my next visit, the *sarvadhikari* of the Ashram invited me to lunch and told me that a few weeks prior to my arrival, my father and mother had come to the Ashram and had given a *bhiksha* to Bhagavan and the Ashramites. After lunch, he presented me a photo of Bhagavan and two small books – *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* and *Ramana Stuti Panchakam*. When I approached Bhagavàn with these gifts, he corrected some printing errors in the two books with his fountain pen, passed his palm over them and gave back to me with his blessed hands.

After the evening meal was over, I followed Bhagavan on his short stroll and asked, " Bhagavan, I am doing Rama mantra *japa.* Is not Arunachala mantra *japa* superior to this?" "No! No!" said Bhagavan vehemently, "Both are identical. 'Ra' means 'that is' and 'ma' means 'thou'. 'A' in Arunachala means 'that', 'ru' means 'thou' and 'na' means 'art'."Then he added, "Using your mind as your mouth, let the name Rama revolve continuously like the Vishnu's *chakra* (discus) within your mind. Let no other know that you are doing *japa.*"

Before leaving the Ashram, the *sarvadhikari* asked me to send him a photograph of Nataraja, the majestic idol in the Meenakshi Temple, in front of whom the boy Ramana stood for long spells of time, shedding copious tears of ecstasy, before he left Madurai for good. He also wanted a photograph of the house where Ramana was born in Tiruchuzhi and of some other places there. These were meant to be placed in the Tamil biography *Sri Ramana Vijayam* by Suddhananda Bharati [No.101]. I could succeed in implementing the request with the help of P.R.S.Mani, my student and an expert photographer.

Towards the end of 1930, I was bedridden. My pain and suffering was so great that I was seriously contemplating suicide, simply because I could not stand the pain any more. My wife wired to her parents that my life was in danger. The following day I told my wife that I might not live for more than a couple of days.

Scarcely had I spoken these words, Vilachi Mani Aiyer, a boyhood friend of Sri Ramana, who had just returned from Tiruvannamalai and happened to be there, took out Bhagavan's *vibhuti* and *kumkum prasad.*

He placed a dot of *kumkum* on my forehead and rubbed the *vibhuti* on my eyebrows. Immediately, a thrill of joy shook my frame, infusing me with a feeling of good health. I sat up in my bed and told my wife, "I am quite well, I will not die. Don't fear."

The same night my wife's parents arrived with my cousin Dr. Rajagopal, who took us to his home in Karur and treated me for a month, by which time I was fully restored to health. I then recollected the song I heard at Trichy: '*Jai* Sri Ramana! Victory unto my Lord Ramana, Siva!' My soul sang the same song.

My sixty-six year old father was suffering from both hernia and asthma. These troubles got aggravated due to frequent trips between Madurai and Tiruchuzhi, which were necessary for negotiations needed to acquire the house where Bhagavan was born. After the deal was concluded and the property acquired for Rs.3000, my father along with others involved in the negotiation, returned to Tiruvannamalai, where he got struck with strangulated hernia.

The attack was sudden and severe. It was not possible to take him by car to the Vellore hospital. The resident Ashram doctor Kuppuswami Aiyer, a staunch devotee of Bhagavan, took courage in both hands and improvised an operation table in the local hospital.

Before taking up the operation he came to Bhagavan and prayed to him for success. My father survived the operation which the specialist in Madurai had said earlier would be fatal at that age and condition of health.

When it became clear that the life of my father had been spared, I prostrated before Bhagavan and said, "This one time Bhagavan has worked a miracle and saved my father's life!" Bhagavan interjected and said, "Why are you saying 'one time'? Why are you not saying 'three times'?" How Bhagavan could remember or know about those two earlier occasions when his grace was sought and secured years ago to save my father's life in similar situations, will always remain a mystery to me.

Prof. Aiyer who in his old age stayed with his son at Tiruvannamalai told the following to V. Ganesan:

In Bhagavan's daily life one noticed personal cleanliness, tidiness of dress, habitual wearing of *vibhuti* and *kumkum* on the forehead; equal sharing of all enjoyment with those around him; strict adherence to a time schedule; performing useful work however 'low' it may be; never

leaving a work unfinished; the pursuit of perfection in every action; incessant activity except while sleeping or resting after a spell of hard work; never considering oneself superior to others; speaking the truth always, or strict silence if the expression of truth would hurt or lower the reputation of others; perfect self-help; never asking another to do a piece of work which can be done by oneself; taking full responsibility for failure, if any, without shifting the blame on others; accepting success or failure with equanimity; never disturbing the peace of others; leaving the leaf-plate clean after eating; complete non-interference in the affairs of others; never worrying about the future.These are the lessons Sri Ramana taught by example to his devotees.

49

Chalam (Gudipati Venkatachalam) (1894-1979) was a famous Telugu author. When he first met Sri Ramana in 1936, he was a radical and militant social campaigner. He worked as an Inspector of Schools. He moved to Arunachala in 1950 and spent the remaining years of his life there. He compiled reminiscences of nineteen Sri Ramana devotees, including his own and of his daughter, in *Bhagavan Smritulu* (Telugu).

I was a very orthodox Hindu when studying in high school, even more so than my elders. Later, when I began my career I found my personal life in a mess. I could not see any connection between the idea of an all-merciful God and a world filled with grief, flaws and difficulties. I lost my faith and began to doubt the very existence of God. I had come to a dead-end after having experimented with various things in my life.

At this stage a friend of mine, Dikshitulu [No.31] took me to Sri Ramanasramam in 1936, on a casual visit. On the way, he asked me to buy some fruits for Bhagavan, but since I had no faith in swamis, I refused. I also refused to prostrate before Bhagavan until Dikshitulu forced me to do so.

On this first visit I found it insufferable to sit silently among the people who had come to see Bhagavan. From the moment of our arrival I was pestering Dikshitulu to take me away from the Ashram. The more I watched the devotees, the more was my dislike for the people in the Ashram.

I asked Dikshitulu, "You say that this Maharshi is a great man who can transform people. But why is it that people who have attached themselves to him for years still look like this?"

On the afternoon of the second day, I saw Bhagavan coming down the hill. Devotees were standing around in groups, talking to each other. As Bhagavan came near, everyone except for me stepped aside to give him more room. I stayed where I was because I thought there was more than enough space for him.

As Bhagavan came nearer, Dikshitulu pulled me to one side. Bhagavan walked past me and then suddenly stopped. He turned back, looked at me, gave me a great smile and went on his way. At the time I did not have any particular feeling for him, but when I recollected the incident later, I felt that Bhagavan won my heart in that one brief moment.

When the time came for us to return, Dikshitulu asked me to go along with him to take leave of Bhagavan. I refused saying, "What relationship is between him and me? Why should I ask for his permission to leave? I do not follow these old traditions." He said, "You were a guest of the Ashram for three days. Won't you at least show the minimum courtesy and say goodbye to him?" I reluctantly accepted the suggestion and went with him. After Dikshitulu had asked Bhagavan for permission to go, I murmured feebly, "I am also going." Bhagavan looked back at me and smiled. That smile caused an unexpected change in me. I don't know what happened to me except that I suddenly felt Bhagavan was saying to me, 'If you go away, how can I carry on living here? How lonely I will feel!' My feet refused to move as I considered the idea of staying a little longer. But when I remembered the people, the hall and the silence that had offended me so much, I felt I could not stay on.

I left the Ashram, reached the station and there ordered hot toast, poached eggs, tea and cigarettes. I did so in a mood of vengeance, as I had been kept away from these things for all the days I had been at the Ashram.

When I reached Vijayawada, my children asked me about the Maharshi. I told them what I had seen and tried to explain Bhagavan's philosophy to them. My words made a strong impression on my elder daughter Souris [next entry].

Out of curiosity, I began to practise the enquiry, 'Who am I?' Souris also took up the practice after I had explained to her how to do it. I continued to sit for meditation and soon started getting very good results. Often, without any effort on my part, the meditation caught hold of me, made me sit and took over for a while. At such times my mind used to stop

completely. When it became clear to me that it was Bhagavan who was causing this improvement, my faith in him increased and spiritual hopes were kindled.

In those days I did not know that Bhagavan was just giving me a taste of the experience of the Self in order to increase my faith in him. I did not have much faith in Bhagavan's philosophy, but I still felt that he was leading me somewhere. My attitude was to let him lead me.

My path to Bhagavan was a long and arduous one. Having a strong atheist background, I had to undergo many years of doubts and sufferings before I could generate enough faith to accept implicitly that Bhagavan was guiding me and protecting me all the time. Other luckier devotees had faith right from the beginning of their association with Bhagavan.

I remember in particular one devotee who had both faith and the intellectual simplicity that I lacked. He was an old Telugu man living in the Draupadi Temple about 300 meters from Sri Ramanasramam. His only possessions were an iron pot and an axe that he used to cut firewood for cooking. He would beg food in the town and cook it in his pot. Each day, for hours together, he could be seen standing and looking at Bhagavan. He would spend the night in the Temple, which was then dilapidated, abandoned and surrounded by jungle.

I once found him standing alone in front of the Temple. When I asked him what he was doing in such a remote spot, he told me that he slept there. I exclaimed, "You sleep here all alone. Are you not afraid?" "Afraid of what?" retorted the old man: "Bhagavan throws his light on me. All night I am surrounded by a blue radiance. So long as his light is with me, how can I be afraid?"

This encounter made me deeply humble. Bhagavan's love and light are given in full measure to a poor old beggar, but there are many in the Ashram like myself, who called themselves his devotees but who had failed to receive such grace because we were too busy attending to the contents of our mind.

I used to spend a lot of time watching Bhagavan in the hall, taking note of different ways in which he responded to the events that were going on around him. He was always something of an enigma to me. This is not really surprising since mere devotees cannot comprehend the state of realised souls. There is no set standard for a *jnani*, no yardstick to judge him by. *Jnanis* cannot be understood because their minds have been destroyed. Sometimes we may feel that their actions have no rational

explanation. But it is sheer ignorance to search for an explanation in apparent contradictions in the behaviour of a *jnani.* Bhagavan used to speak and behave according to the need, the state and situation of each person. Not being aware of these factors, we are in no position to pass judgement on him.

The events, activities and dialogues in the hall sometimes seemed, to uninformed observers, to have a bizarre or irrational character because they were not aware that the power of Bhagavan orchestrated the scene in such a way that everything that needed to happen happened automatically. One inexplicable incident might be a message only for one devotee in the hall. That devotee might understand the import of the message. The rest of us, not knowing the full circumstances, would merely be bewildered. Or, in another case, Bhagavan might notice that the ego of a devotee sitting before him was rising, and he may rebuke him in some way. The others in the hall might interpret this as an unprovoked attack.

I relate an incident that produced a reaction in Bhagavan, which I alone could understand. A friend of mine, who had no faith in swamis, came to the Ashram. Having decided in advance not to prostrate to Bhagavan, he spent the time of his brief visit wandering around the Ashram. In the evening, as it was summer, Bhagavan's chair was placed outside near the well. Bhagavan sat on it, surrounded by the devotees. My friend, wandering in the area at that time, felt an irrepressible desire to prostrate and he fell full length at Bhagavan's feet. Bhagavan laughed loudly. None of the devotees, except for me, knew why Bhagavan had suddenly laughed. Everyone else was looking around, trying to ascertain the cause of Bhagavan's laughter.

Bhagavan was never impressed by the achievements, reputation or pedigree of the people who visited him. They might have done a lot of *sadhana*, but it made no difference when they appeared before him. When many such people came, he would not even raise his eyes to look at them. Sometimes he would laugh and show great love towards particular devotees, but at other times he would be totally indifferent to the same persons. For some visitors, he would come down to their level and answer each of their questions with great patience, but he would not even open his mouth if the same questions were put by someone else.

Though Bhagavan would make no adverse remarks about traditional practices, he did not support his devotees if they did so. Echammal [No. 60], one of his greatest devotees, told him with great pride about her *puja* with one lakh leaves. Bhagavan remarked, "Instead of pinching the

plant, could you not pinch your own skin one lakh times and perform *puja* that way?"

Sometimes Bhagavan would be indifferent to all the events that were going on around him, but at other times he would show a keen interest in the trivia of everyday life. Once he took great care of an sparrow's egg, which had fallen down from the nest, until the baby sparrow emerged. Afterwards he showed the baby sparrow to everyone. But the next moment, he might reply uninterestedly, "Oh, is that so?" if it was reported to him that someone who was considered to be a known devotee had passed away. who was considered to be a known devotee had passed away.

Bhagavan was a great champion of the oppressed, and he had a natural tendency to side with the social underdog in any dispute. He insisted that he would not eat in the dining room until all the poor at the Ashram gate that were awaiting food, had been fed. If the Ashram prepared diluted *sambhar* for the poor, Bhagavan would get angry and insist that he be fed with the same. Even when he was ill, he would insist that the fruit and milk that were given to him for medicinal reasons should be distributed among all those present in the hall.

Bhagavan frequently made it clear that he did not want devotees to be prevented from seeing him. In view of his declining health, Bhagavan needed rest. Guards were placed outside his room with strict instructions to avoid any disturbance from the visitors. A *sadhu* who happened to arrive at the Ashram, wanted to see Bhagavan. But the guards and the office staff turned down his request firmly. The disappointed *sadhu* started walking sadly towards the gate. Bhagavan might have overheard his request, for when the *sadhu* passed Bhagavan's room, he was astonished to find Bhagavan standing outside, waiting for him. They gazed at each other for sometime. The *sadhu* went on his way and Bhagavan returned to his room.

A significant number of Bhagavan's devotees were orthodox Brahmins. They ate in a separate enclosure in the dining room. Bhagavan never objected to this arrangement. But he did show his disapproval if any of the Brahmins looked down on members of the lower castes. A Brahmin woman in the Ashram avoided all non-Brahmins because she felt that any contact with them would pollute her. If she were ever touched by a non-Brahmin, she would go up to Bhagavan and touch him to purify her. Once, on a *jayanti* day, someone touched her accidentally. She went to Bhagavan and said, Bhagavan, a Sudra has just touched me; please touch me to remove the impurity. "Go away, I will not oblige you!" said Bhagavan angrily.

Bhagavan's mother was a very orthodox lady, full of caste prejudices and superstitions. Bhagavan did not tolerate any of her ideas. He criticised her many times and was quite ruthless in destroying all that stood in the way of her emancipation from ignorance and fear. When she refused to cook onions, which are taboo to a Brahmin widow, Bhagavan would show her one and say, "How mighty is this little bulb! It can stop my mother from going to heaven."

Although Bhagavan was half-naked and lived in a very unostentatious way, most people were afraid to approach him to speak with him. Important men such as senior army officials, or highly placed persons who held important positions in various fields trembled and were afraid to go up to that decrepit old form that had neither temporal power nor even a significant following.

Bhagavan's appearance changed periodically. When he sat looking out beyond horizon, he would remind us of Lord Dakshinamurthi in *dhyana* posture. When he sat in his majestic unmoving posture, which he often did, there was unspeakable beauty and grace in his figure.Wearing only a loincloth he would bring to our minds an emperor wearing magnificant robes, sitting on a diamond-studded throne, with all the paraphernalia of his estate. But then, when somebody called 'Bhagavan', he would come down from some unknown region to this earth to attend to the call.

Gurus like Bhagavan are manifestations of God in human form. To relieve and redeem the suffering of mankind, the Lord occasionally comes down to earth and manifests in a physical form.

[*The Mountain Path* records: When Chalam complained to Sri Ramana that he felt sleepy during the *sadhana*, the sharp answer was, 'Then go to sleep'.]

50

Souris, daughter of Chalam (preceding entry), bore a Westernised name and her family's way of living was also Westernised. Her father had rejected Indian systems and traditions.

When I saw Bhagavan's photo for the first time in *The Sunday Times*, I wondered who that ugly person could be. I thought, 'not only does he get himself photographed half-naked, he also gets the picture printed in newspapers'. At the same time I loathed him and what he stood for. I

discovered that his name was Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, which sounded harsh and artificial to my ears. Bhagavan, Ramaṇa and Maharshi: I did not see any relation between these names. I felt that he had added these titles merely for the sake of self-advertisement, to show himself off.

My aesthetic feelings were so hurt that if I ever saw the Maharshi's photo in a newspaper I used to turn the page as quickly as possible. **At that time, when I was fourteen years old, I couldn't stand the sight of him. But now, today, I know no other beauty is comparable to the beauty of the Maharshi. It is not merely a feeling; it is a conviction, a sure knowledge. His enchanting smile, his melodious voice, the nod of his head, his wonderful look that splits through the *maya* of the world, these are found nowhere else in the world.**

When my father returned from his first visit to the Ashram in 1936, I was lying down with a headache. Everyone except me crowded round father to listen to his account of the visit. I initially ignored him, but when I heard him say the name of Arunachala my heart got filled with joy. I got up from my bed and sat near father because his story had begun to fascinate me. As I joined him, father was describing Bhagavan's philosophy of Self-knowledge. He was explaining that Bhagavan teaches that the mind, the intellect, the five sensory organs and the body are not real, and we should know the real 'I'.

Everyone was listening, but except for me, none of us could grasp or understand the ideas that father was trying to explain. Since my childhood I had wondered: Is the world real or is it a dream? I had known since childhood that behind my mind there is an 'I' that has no connection with the mind. I had tried unsuccessfully to reach and know this 'I' many times. I knew that the mind was a barrier that prevented the goal from being reached, but I had no idea how to bypass it. When I heard Bhagavan's teachings, I felt that they were pointing me in the direction of the truth I was seeking.

I went to bed and stretched myself out. Father came and sat near me. He applied some *vibhuti* he had brought from the Ashram to my forehead and uttered Bhagavan's name twice. I felt a cool power flowing from my father's fingers into my forehead. Immediately my headache disappeared. Later I read the booklet *Who am I*? and started to practise the technique.

At the beginning, each time I tried to banish thoughts one by one, ten thoughts would arise in place of each one I banished. This made me feel depressed. But about ten days after I started my practice, the figure

of Bhagavan appeared before me. Till then I had never seen him, except in photos. Immediately all the thoughts in my mind subsided of their own accord, filling my heart with joy and love. I would have stopped such a difficult *sadhana* on account of my young age, but I soon discovered that the headache that had troubled me since childhood vanished if I meditated.

Ever since I read Brunton's *A Search in Secret India* [No.1], the desire to see Bhagavan became intense. His name constantly filled my mind. I spent a whole year yearning to go to Bhagavan before I got a chance to see him. I went along with my parents. We entered Bhagavan's hall at 8 a.m. As soon as he saw me, Bhagavan smiled as if I were an old acquaintance. It seemed to me that he had been expecting me for a long time. I sat before him and almost immediately fell into a trance. It was so natural; it was like a fish being put into water.

I went to see Bhagavan again with my father in the late 1930s. Though I was often in ecstasy in Bhagavan's presence, I could not escape from some difficulties. The behaviour, traditions and methods of worship at the Ashram continually grated on me. One evening, while I was sitting in a trance, the person distributing *prasad* came up to me and said loudly, "Take it." I stretched out my left-hand because by birth I am left-handed. He responded by rebuking me. I was unhappy since I did not like being shouted at by the attendants.

I did not see meaning in many of the rituals. Whenever the priest brought *arati* after *puja*, Bhagavan would stretch out his hand to the flame and then apply *vibhuti* and *kumkum* to the forehead. I never understood why Bhagavan behaved in this way like an orthodox Brahmin. I thought that since he was a *jnani* who always saw the whole world as a foolish game, he should not behave like this. There were many other occasions when I saw him behaving in a way that seemed opposite to his teachings, as I then understood them. I was confused. This confusion was so great that I felt my love for him would diminish. But then I began to correct my attitude.

I said to myself, "What are we before him? If Bhagavan takes *arati* very devoutly, why should I have any objection?" Because of all these thoughts about Bhagavan and *arati*, my meditation used to get disturbed. Then, one day, I saw Major Chadwick [No.42] take *arati* very devoutly and apply *vibhuti* and *kumkum* to his forehead. It moved me very much. If, for a Hindu by birth like me, there does not appear much meaning or rationale in the *arati*, it should appear even more meaningless to a foreigner such as him. From that day on I saw beauty in whatever Bhagavan did.

For me, being in Bhagavan's presence was like being in heaven. If I am to write how Bhagavan has impressed me, all the vocabulary I can command in the three languages I know would not suffice. When a word issued forth from his lips – generally he did not speak much at all – it was just as astonishing as it would be if words had come forth from an inanimate idol. Above all else I noticed his sparkling eyes; even in the dark one could see them sparkle. And when he looked at us, his sight, like an arrow, pierced right into the deepest recesses of the heart.

At the Ashram I felt that apart from this place the entire world is non-existent. I didn't like to go away, leaving Bhagavan. I only wanted to stay there. When I came back from the Ashram in 1939, home seemed like a jail to me. But whenever I thought strongly of going back to Arunachala, Bhagavan would appear in a dream and counsel me, "Why do you worry? I am always with you."

In one of my dreams Bhagavan appeared and asked me, "Will you choose a writing career or Self-realisation?" I replied in the dream that I would choose Self-realisation. After this dream, people who had read my published stories used to ask, "What are you writing nowadays?" When I answered, "Bhagavan told me to stop," they would look at me in disbelief.

I continued my *sadhana* at home. If Bhagavan had not guided me through my dreams during that long period (before I moved to Arunachala permanently in 1950), I would have gone astray many times and would have been deceived by many.

In January 1950, when Bhagavan was in the last stages of his life, I, along with my father, packed up all our belongings and moved to Arunachala, our only refuge, to take up permanent residence there. Within a few weeks of our arrival, Bhagavan gave up the body. We had come to die in his presence, but instead he passed away before our very eyes. We stayed on near his *samadhi*. For us, there was nowhere else to go.

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Swami Madhavatirtha (1895-1960) was a prolific writer on a wide variety of spiritual topics. He had studied Vedanta and found himself increasingly attracted to the teachings of Sri Aurobindo, which failed to satisfy him. His first and only visit to the Ashram for two weeks

took place in 1944. In his book *The Life and Teachings of Ramana Maharshi* (original in Gujarati), he wrote that the visit substantially changed the course of his life.

I should like to refer to a somewhat mystical experience I had during my visit. It is rather difficult to describe such an experience but I shall try to convey some idea about it by borrowing an analogy from the *Bhagavatam.* Sometime before the birth of Lord Krishna, it is said, the Lord entered the heart of Vasudeva, who then shined like the sun. Later, that light passed into Devaki through a mere look of Vasudeva, after which she shined like the moon.

On the very first day of my *darshan* of the Maharshi in the dining hall, I found in the look of the sage the dazzling brilliance of the sun. On a subsequent day, **while in the presence of the Maharshi in the hall, I recognised the same brilliance in the look of the sage. It seemed to pierce me to the core of my being, even as the light of the Lord passed into Devaki through the look of Vasudeva. My breath seemed to stop for a while and my mind was elevated into some spiritual realm of unutterable peace and happiness.**

I had authored a small book entitled *Maya* in which I had attempted to relate certain ideas on the reality of the world to those propounded by Einstein in his theory of relativity. I had sent the Maharshi a copy of my book prior to my visit. It was a revelation to me that the Maharshi could judge offhand, as it were, such modern theories as that of relativity, proceeding entirely on the basis of his own experience of the Absolute.

While sitting in the hall, I observed the Maharshi resting on his couch wholly unconcerned with what was taking place in his presence. From the constant flow of visitors who prostrated before him and moved one after the other, I could easily discern in him the attitude of oneness with all. I can confidently say that it was through his *abhinnabhava* (feeling of parity for all) that he touched the inner being of visitors, who were then able to feel within themselves the presence of the universal spirit, transcending thought.

Having realised that the Maharshi was radiating the power of the Self in this way, I decided to ask how I could best prepare myself to receive the transmission of grace while sitting in his presence. He said, "You will get spiritual help sitting in this hall if you keep yourself still. The aim is to give up all practices. When the mind becomes still, the power of Self will be experienced. The waves of Self will be experienced. The

waves of the Self are pervading everywhere. If the mind is at peace, one begins to experience them."

The reciprocal relationship between the Maharshi and his *abhinnabhava* and the aspirant sitting in his presence is analogous to that of a radio transmitter and a receiver. If the visitor is anxious to receive the fullest benefit of the benign influence radiating from the silent presence of the sage, he must attune his mind, which according to the analogy will be the receiving set tuned to proper wavelength.

The silence of the sage is constant and exercises uninterruptedly its benign influence, whether the sage appears to be outwardly aware of the world or not. Reverting to the analogy of the transmitter, I may say that so far as the sage is concerned, his spiritual influence is transmitting unceasingly. But from the point of view of the seeker, who is still subject to the veiling power of *maya*, the continued beneficent influence exercised by the sage will have no apparent effect unless the seeker is ready to receive it.

When I enquired whether I should gaze at his eyes or his face, or should close my eyes and concentrate on a particular object, he replied, "Gaze at your own real nature. Everywhere there is one, so it is all the same whether you keep your eyes open or closed. If you wish to meditate, do so on the 'I' that is within you. It is *atman.*"

When asked about the required sitting posture, the sage's view was that stability in Self was the real posture. The compulsion of having a particular kind of posture could make the mind agitated.

Regarding the *swaadhyaya* (personal study) he said, "Self is the real book. You can glance anywhere in that book; nobody can take it away from you.Whenever you are free turn towards Self.Thereafter you may read whatever you like."

About the problem of weariness, fear and anxiety, he said, "Find out to whom the problem occurs. By conducting this inquiry these things will disappear. If you direct your mind towards Self, fear and anxiety will go away."

The Maharshi told me that 'I' (*ahamkara*) feeling is the root of all thoughts. If you destroy the root, the leaves and branches will wither away. Having put the question 'Who am I'? before the mind, one should search for the root of the 'I' and make very sincere and persistent efforts to stop other thoughts. In all *sadhanas* the mind has to be kept quiet. Further, to get the experience one should not rely on *buddhi* alone, but should combine it with a firm conviction (*bhavana*) about one's success through continued effort against all odds.

The Maharshi said that when camphor burns nothing remains afterwards. In the same way, while searching the Self all efforts must be made to ensure that the mind is burnt out. So long as the world is not realised to be false, thoughts of the world will keep on coming. Without the mind there is no world. In sleep, since there is no mind, there is no world. The world exists in relation to the mind. It is not a thing independent and existing by itself.

Once a visitor asked, why does God allow so much injustice to go on and why there is so much insufficiency among us?The Maharshi replied, "Go to God and ask Him about it. If you cannot go to Him as you are admitting, how to ask the question? Weak people do not get liberation." In answer to another question, the Maharshi said, "So long as the body is there, some activity is bound to happen. Only the attitude 'I am the doer' has to be given up. The activities do not obstruct. It is the attitude 'I did' that is the obstruction. Further, so long as an external object is required [for happiness], incompleteness is felt. When it is felt that *atman* alone is there, permanent happiness stays."

The Maharshi disagreed with Sri Aurobindo's view that getting established in the Self in a perfect manner is not possible through a normal human body. For this, according to Sri Aurobindo, it was necessary to have a *vignanamaya sarira,* that is, a body which will not be attacked by disease and not die without one's desire.

The Maharshi's replies were always very cogent. Every word seemed to have a force that made disputation entirely out of place.

Although the Maharshi gave forthright answers to questions, at no point of time did he insist that he alone was right.

During one conversation that I noted down, he pointed out that the evangelical fervour that can be found in many religious zealots is merely a manifestation of their egos.

The Maharshi never wanted to impose Hindu ideas on those who would not appreciate them. If Christians, Muslims and others came to him for advice, he would propound the essential mystical teachings of their own religion and ask them to strive for union with their own particular chosen God.

The Maharshi never encouraged worship of his form. He refused to let himself be garlanded and would not permit any one to do *puja* to him.

Whether the Maharshi spoke in order to clear the doubts of an earnest aspirant, or whether he sat in perfect silence, one received a fresh illumination, a new angle of vision and sometimes a very inspiring reorientation of one's spiritual outlook.

Embodying the Advaitic truth, the one universal spirit transcending the bounds of time and space, **the Maharshi truly represents in himself the University of Spiritual Education.**

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Kunju Swami served as one of the Maharshi's attendants from 1920 till 1932. In 1977, he wrote his reminiscences.[1] He says that his guru Kuppandi Swami told him about the greatness of the Maharshi, whom he had visited. Sometime in 1920, he left his home in Kerala with great eagerness to have Sri Ramana's *darshan*.

As I sat in the railway station my mind was dwelling so intensely on my desire to see Bhagavan that hunger and thirst were forgotten. After waiting for more than 12 hours for the train to Tiruvannamalai, I was told that tickets were not being issued to that town; instead they issued a ticket to Katpadi, about 50 miles north of Tiruvannamalai. I reached Katpadi at 4 a.m. and waited for the train to Tiruvannamalai, which was to leave at 6.30 a.m. When I went to the counter at 6 a.m. for getting the ticket, I was told that the train came early and had left at 5.30 a.m. The next train was to leave at 6 p.m. This news disoriented me for sometime.

I waited patiently and went to the ticket office at 5.30 p.m. to be told that tickets were not being issued for Tiruvannamalai. I was bewildered because, yet again, no reason was given. While wondering what to do, an elderly gentleman called out to me and after learning about my destination told me, "Due to an outbreak of plague, Tiruvannamalai has been quarantined. If you buy a ticket to Tirukoilur (a station further down the line) you can get down at Tiruvannamalai in the dark when the train stops there to deliver the mail."

As suggested, I asked for a ticket to Tirukoilur and handed over all the money I had. The ticket clerk counted it and told me that the ticket would cost a quarter rupee more than the amount I had. Extremely disappointed I wandered out of the booking office and stood on the edge of the platform. There I thought of Bhagavan and felt very sad that my sincere attempt to see him had apparently been frustrated.

A few minutes before the arrival of the train, I noticed at some distance from where I was standing, a glittering quarter rupee coin between

the two rails. I ran, jumped down, took it and managed to purchase a ticket just as the train was entering the station.

When the train entered Tiruvannamalai station, I saw the person sitting opposite me disembarking in the dark. I too got down and followed him. It was Bhagavan's will that I had missed the morning train at Katpadi station. Had I taken that train, it would have been impossible to get off at Tiruvannamalai.

I followed my fellow passenger without knowing where he was going. He walked for sometime, stopped at a *mandapam*, lay down and went to sleep. I joined him on the floor and immediately went to sleep, tired but very happy. Next morning, I could not find the man who had guided me to the *mandapam,* but I could see Arunachala before me. I reached Bhagavan's abode, based on the instructions got before leaving home.

When I reached the Skandasram, I felt a thrill on seeing Bhagavan. I told him in Malayalam all about my boyhood, how I had been doing *japa* and giving spiritual discourses. Bhagavan listened to everything with a smile. In reply to my question as to what I should do to get over my confusion and gain clarity, Bhagavan said, "First know who you are. See from where thoughts arise. Turn your mind inwards and see in the Heart."[The point on the right side of the chest meant for focussing attention.]

As we sat silently, Bhagavan's gracious look was fixed on me. At that very moment all my confusions ceased and I experienced a peace and bliss I had never experienced before.

While we were together Bhagavan would often look at me; and as he did so, I became aware that his eyes had a strange brilliance and fascination in them. **Whenever I looked into his eyes for any length of time, I saw bright effulgence. I was also filled with a strange peace and bliss. After each experience I would come back to my normal physical state with a shudder.** This occurred on each of the eighteen days I stayed with Bhagavan. I was like someone intoxicated.

Back home, the meditative state experienced in Bhagavan's presence steadily declined. I slowly became my old restless self. While I was dwelling on my disappointment, my friend Ramakrishna Swami, who also had been to Bhagavan, came to my place and revealed that his experience had been the same as mine. Feeling that it would be pointless to stay at home, we both decided to take refuge in Bhagavan and reached Tiruvannamalai. To help us out of our problem that it was a sin to eat at Guru's place without performing any service in return, both of us were assigned responsibility to serve Bhagavan and his ashram.

One day when I asked Bhagavan why the experiences I had felt in his presence did not continue after my return, he referred to verses 83 to 93 of the first section of *Kaivalya Navaneeta*. He then summarised the verses and said, "The experience of the Self can occur in the presence of the guru, but it may not last. The disciple has to continue to study, think and practise until the distinction between knower, known and knowing no longer exists."

In the early days of my stay at the Skandasram, I found that I could get all my doubts cleared merely by listening to the answers to questions put by other devotees. Moreover, by listening to the answers I was able to learn many new aspects of Bhagavan's teachings.

On several occasions Bhagavan's body would disappear in a flash and disperse into its component atoms. A little later a smoke-like form would appear and the atoms would come together in a form that resembled particles of dust. Finally, the body would reappear in its normal form.[2]

Bhagavan wrote the *Upadesa Saaram* in four different languages. The Telugu and Sanskrit versions are in couplets, the Tamil in three-line stanzas, and the Malayalam in four-line verses. When I took the Malayalam verses to a well-known Malayalam professor for his opinion, he marvelled at the purity of diction achieved by a writer whose mother tongue was not Malayalam.[3]

In his *Arunachala Ashtakam* (1913), Bhagavan gives the analogy of film projection by saying that a series of subtle thoughts that appear within us as shadowy spectacles of the world, appear without as the world perceived by the five senses like a film projected through a lens.[4]

One of the earliest persons to recognise Bhagavan's greatness was Achyutadasa, a famous poet and a scholar. When Bhagavan was staying at the Gurumurtam in the late 1890s, he went for Bhagavan's *darshan.* After performing *bhajans* for sometime, he sat near Bhagavan, caught hold of his feet and hands and immediately went into a state of ecstasy. When Achyutadasa's disciples also wanted to hold Bhagavan's feet, he stopped them by saying, "This is a huge fire, and none of you can get close to it."

At the Skandasram we never saw Bhagavan lying on the bed fully stretched out on his back or his side. Nor did we ever see him with a pillow under his head. He never used to lie down and sleep like other people. Instead, he would sleep sitting down in a semi-reclining position, with a few pillows supporting his back. Sometimes, he would support his head with his hand while sleeping.[5]

Bhagavan's head would shake continuously and without the stick to support he could not walk or even stand upright. These were not symptoms of old age. Both the shaking of the head and his holding on to a stick date back to very early days. These were the marks left on him by the stupendous experience of *atmanubhuti* in Madurai! When asked about this condition, Bhagavan remarked, "What do you think would happen to a small thatched hut inside which a big elephant is kept tied up? Wouldn't it be shattered? Same is the case here!"[6]

An old woman living near Arunachaleswara Temple[7] and some other elderly people in the town had decided that they would eat morning food only after Bhagavan's *darshan* at the Skandasram. One day the lady devotee could not come. Bhagavan asked her the next day as to why she had missed a day. She answered, "Realising my infirmity you gave *darshan* from near my house, while you were sitting on the rock near the ashram, brushing your teeth." She added, "I am not able to climb the hill everyday, I would now have your *darshan* from my house." From that day onwards, even when the weather was bad, Bhagavan brushed his teeth sitting on that rock. This proved convenient to many other elderly devotees who wanted to have his *darshan* but were unable to climb the hill.[8]

In the Ashram kitchen only Brahmins were allowed to cook, because Brahmins will not eat food cooked by non-Brahmins. Bhagavan approved of this not because he favoured religious orthodoxy but because he didn't want to cause offence to the many Brahmins who stayed at the Ashram.

Once it became necessary for me to go to my place in Kerala. I had just enough money to buy the train ticket and no extra money to buy food on the way. That afternoon a devotee unexpectedly brought a lot of *pooris* and served them to Bhagavan and others in the Ashram. We were surprised to see that Bhagavan, who normally did not take more than two *pooris*, happily accepted six from the devotee.When the serving was over, he ate only one of the six and neatly packed and tied the remaining five with his own hands and gave the packet to me. Everyone was deeply touched by Bhagavan's compassion.

We had the benefit of regularly receiving personal instructions from Bhagavan. One of them was that we should get into a meditative state before going to sleep. We were also advised to go into meditation for sometime, immediately after getting out of bed.

In 1932, after spending about twelve years in personal attendance on Bhagavan, I felt the urge to devote myself entirely to *sadhana*. I had been debating the matter for some days when the answer came in a strange

way. As I entered the hall one day, I heard Bhagavan saying to others who were there that the real service to him did not mean attending to his physical needs, it meant following the essence of his teachings, that is, concentrating on realising the Self. This cleared my doubts and I shifted to a room in Palakottu[9] to continue with my *tapas*, and at the same time remain in close and regular contact with Bhagavan.

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1. These were translated into English by Dr. K.Subrahmanian (no. 33), and got printed by him for Sri Ramanasramam with the help of devotees of Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad.
2. David Godman says that when he spoke to Kunju Swami about this phenomenon, the latter conceded that he had never personally seen Bhagavan enter that state, but added that the story was a matter of common knowledge when he was staying at the Skandasram. (*Refer* Godman's book *The Power Of The Presence*, part-II, p. 17.)
3. *Refer* no. 41, p. 102, where Telugu translation of *Upadesa Saaram* has been extolled.
4. David Godman asked Kunju Swami how Bhagavan managed to acquire the knowledge of the film projection system during the very early years of the twentieth century. Sri Ramana used this analogy in *Self-Enquiry* as early as 1902. Kunju Swami's answer was: "I don't know. We always used to wonder where he got his practical knowledge. He lived a very unworldly life, yet somehow he amassed a vast repertoire of practical skills. He just seemed, quite naturally, to know them." (Source: *The Power Of The Presence, op. cit.*, pp.28-9.)
5. *Refer* no.88, where Sri Ramana tells Dr. M.Anantanarayana Rao that "he had not slept flat on the ground or on the couch ever since he came to Tiruvannamalai," p. 233 .
6. *Moments Remembered* by V. Ganesan, Sri Ramanasramam, p.7.
7. *Refer* annexure-I, p.410.
8. The Skandasram is located on the hill facing Tiruvannamalai town.
9. Sadhus' colony abutting on the Ashram.

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Muruganar (C.K.Subramania Iyer) (1893-1973), an outstanding devotee of Sri Ramana and a great poet, composed thousands of poems praising Sri Ramana, or recording his teachings, or expressing gratitude to him for having established him in the Self. His poems are an ocean of devotion and veneration for the Maharshi.

Muruganar was a well-respected Tamil scholar before visiting Sri Ramana. His father-in-law Dandapani Swami, an ardent devotee of Sri Ramana, once gave him a copy of *Aksharamanamalai,*[1] a reading of which prompted him to go to Tiruvannamalai in 1923. He immediately recognised that the Maharshi was the Guru he had been actively seeking. He has described his visit and the background that led up to it in his poetical compositions translated below:

I heard from devotees who have redeemed themselves by the grace of one at Tiruvannamalai, who is the embodiment of true *jnana* and who shines as the flame of true *tapas*... Hearing them I was lost in admiration and unceasing joy… Like one suffering from thirst comes across a Ganges of cold water, I went to Ramana Maharshi with eleven verses[2] and met the ocean of *mauna,* the bestower of *jnana*…On seeing him my mind dissolved in the same way as wax melts on encountering fire. The hair on my body stood on end. Devotion surged in me like an ocean that has seen the full moon.

I read the eleven verses with an unsteady and quivering voice. At that very moment he graciously looked at me with his lotus eyes. From that day on, the praises given out by my impartial tongue belonged only to him… From the way he bestowed his grace becoming my Lord and Master, I was completely convinced that he was Siva himself. As my new 'owner' he made my 'I' and 'mine' his own.

In the succeeding months I came to visit him on many occasions. I was gradually influenced by him and my outlook on life was getting altered. Sometime after my mother's death, I left my job in 1926 and came to Tiruvannamalai, making it my permanent residence.

The following extracts are from Muruganar's* Sri Ramana Anubhuti *first published in 1948, more than twenty years after he had the experiences described below:

I was a learned fool. My flawed mind knew nothing till I came to dwell with him whose glance filled my heart with the light of awareness. I entered into union with the deathless state of knowledge of the Reality.

As the deadly delusion of a body-bound ego faded, a flower of pure light unfolded at his holy feet. That radiance grew ever brighter with my love until I realised the flawless knowledge of the Self, manifesting as the unbroken awareness 'I-I' within my heart.

I was wandering deluded in the mind's labyrinth of dreams, rushing hither and thither, desiring one thing then another until the joy of union with the Lord welled up within me. My body merged into the infinite light of divine wisdom and my heart was filled with a deep inner tranquility.

He is the teacher of the eternal law through whose glance the truth unfolded, filling my heart with the dazzling radiance of blissful consummate grace, so that the body, ego and intellect were all no more. I became merged in the divine silence, which is abiding knowledge of Lord Siva.

A noble lion, he fixed the victorious gaze of true knowledge upon the rutting elephant of my ego, which was drunk with self-conceit, filling me with the sweet nectar of union with Lord Siva, so that the inner experience of divine wisdom became my whole existence.

My poor helpless mind was swept along in the swirling torrent of objective phenomena until my Lord guided my deluded understanding into the broad calm of his holy silence so that the light of his majesty shined in my heart.

I read the scriptures but my mind could not grasp their meaning. It was only through the gracious intervention of my wise teacher and Master, working inwardly, that his own state of unbroken meditation became permanent within me and my heart was penetrated and held in Reality's eternal grasp.

Languishing in the slough of my soul's defilement, I knew not a single moment of clear understanding until my Lord revealed to me myself as *Brahman.* Transporting me into a realm of pure bliss, the vision of the authentic Self expanded within my heart and I attained the state of grace whose essence is love.

I, poor sinner, gripped by the bonds of excessive desire, I was deluded by my ruinous attachment to the pleasures of the senses. But when he conferred upon me the bliss of his true knowledge, all delusion was dispelled. Dwelling thus as one with Sri Ramana is nothing less than union with Lord Siva.

Setting me on the straight path of true knowledge he led me to the glorious goal of union with him in the one-pointed state of holy silence. My heart's gracious jewel, true wisdom's sun, he dissipated the dark clouds of the senses' illusory world.

And now within my heart full of joy I made for him a home I can receive no other. Only he remains, the Supreme Self, manifesting as consciousness, pure light, empty and yet replete.

Gaining a new life, I spent it singing praises to the lofty truth of his glorious name, albeit in feeble words of little worth. But my Lord did not

deem my hymns unworthy. Embracing me in the outpouring of his affection, with more than mother's love, he banished my deadly delusion and made me his servant.

Beneath my Guru's gaze my heart was emptied of guile so that the false understanding that has usurped my heart disappeared completely, and there, in the silence of his holy feet, the pure ocean of the Self, swept me into the deep bliss of the absolute Godhead.

Surrounded by desires that led me astray, my heart was hardened and my understanding was tricked by the illusion of a personal self. Hail to the Lord who through his love refreshed my heart, banishing my deluded attachment to land ownership, wealth and women.

In the late 1920s Muruganar recorded the teachings of Sri Ramana in 1,254 Tamil verses. The Maharshi himself went through them, making innumerable changes and corrections, and also composed 28 new verses which were added at appropriate places in the text. These were published as* Guruvachaka-Kovai *(A collection of the Guru's sayings).* Sri Ramana Sannidhi Murai *of 1851 verses gives further details of the circumstances that brought Muruganar to Sri Ramana and the later events. A few extracts from the latter collection are:

The Supreme Being Siva, abides as the real nature of one's own Self. It cannot be reached by those indulging in fallacious arguments. Tolerating my immature conduct and treating me as if I have attained freedom from impurities, [Siva] considered admitting me to the group of his companions.

He became the incomparable sage at Arunachala, which is praised even by the gods. Like the worm that becomes a wasp on being stung by a wasp, through his mere presence and glance my 'I' and 'mine' were destroyed. Seeing me as his own Self, he enabled me to experience Myself as enduring, pure being consciousness. With my body and mind absent, I became full of Self. This is how he bestowed his grace on this pitiable one.

You are the unmoving one; you are the compassionate one; you are the skillful Lord of true knowledge. To poor me, who was totally lost by not seeking consciousness, you are like the store laid down to be used in times of adversity. You are the god who saved me from the mouth of the crocodile, my past *karma*.

Human beings wallow in *samsara* regarding themselves as forms, without realising the rarity of the grace-embodied form of the *sadguru*.

Through this form he has manifested to destroy the mass of their dark *vasanas*. Those who are under the spell of the 'I am the body' delusion, through their simple-minded view, which is prompted by ignorance, extend the same notion ['he is a body'] to the *sadguru*.

The Lord of Arunachala, which is solidified consciousness, is Ramana, a delight to my mind. It is difficult to say whether he has a form or is formless, whether he is masculine, feminine or neuter, one or many, atomic or cosmic, Self or non-Self, joy or misery. So it is extremely difficult to define his nature, his actions, his ways and their propriety. In essence, Ramana's real nature defies definition.

T.R. Kanakammal in her book* Cherished Memories *records:

Muruganar used to perform the ritualistic ceremonies prescribed for the death anniversaries of his parents. Once, on the day of his mother's anniversary, he came to the Ashram kitchen very early in the morning. He washed his *dhoti* and hung it up to dry. Then, with a wet towel around his waist, he set about getting the vegetables ready. Having understood the purpose of Muruganar being in the kitchen so early, Bhagavan, who happened to be in the kitchen, said to Muruganar, "It is your mother's annual ceremony today, who are the Brahmins?"

Sri Ramana, who did not consider these rituals important, added after tapping himself on the chest, "I could be one of the Brahmins." Hearing this, Muruganar felt so moved that he could hardly keep himself from breaking down completely. He felt that at the very instance when Bhagavan tapped his chest and said, "I shall be one the Brahmins for the ceremony," not only his parents but also several generations of his ancestors would have attained liberation. Muruganar never again felt it necessary to perform the annual ceremony of his parents.

However, on the next death ceremony of his mother he brought a large jackfruit to the Ashram, with the intention of distributing it among the devotees, in memory of his mother. Bhagavan saw Murganar with the jackfruit and said, "It is your mother's anniversary, is it not? I see you have not yet managed to get rid of these sentimental attachments!" Hearing this, Murganar exclaimed, "I will never do such a thing again."

Even belief in rituals can bind one, and Bhagavan was very particular about breaking every one of the ties binding his disciples.

[The poet refused to live with his wife Meenakshi, after he had surrendered to Sri Ramana – see no. 127, p.304.]

1. *Refer* Glossary / Books at p. 425.
2. These were written by the poet as his offerings to Sri Ramana at the first meeting he had with him.

54

T.P. Ramachandra Iyer was a native of Tiruvannamalai. His interest in religion and philosophy led him to Sri Ramana in the 1920s. As a lawyer in Madras, he handled much of the Ashram's legal work. He also served as an interpreter and as an attendant in the Maharshi's hall.

I entered Sri Bhagavan's hall and looked at him. I fell flat on my face in prostration to him with an experience as totally consuming as it was convincing. A discovery that 'He', whom I was hankering for all these years, who could sway my entire being and guide my energies, was here. **He was so great yet so simple.** I rose up. Bhagavan smiled and bade me to be seated. All the emotions, thoughts and surging doubts were nowhere! I felt I had found my refuge, and the greatest fortune of my life.

A lot of people are under the impression that Bhagavan talked Advaitic philosophy all the time and prescribed self-enquiry to everyone who asked for his advice. This is simply not so: Bhagavan's advice could differ according to the need of the situation.[1]

When the Ashram Post Office was opened, a high official of the postal department, whose only son had died, came with his wife to the Ashram. He said, "We loved the boy very much. After his death we have known neither peace nor happiness. We have only one desire left. Can we see our son in our next birth?" He wanted an assurance for this. After some persuasion that did not prove effective, Bhagavan leaned forward, raised his hand as if to assure them, and said, "Yes, in your next birth you will see your son as clearly as you saw him in this birth." This made the man extremely happy. He touched Bhagavan's feet many times and went away in a very contented mood.

After he left, I said, "Bhagavan, why did you speak like this? How is it possible?" Bhagavan replied, "What can I do? If I had not spoken in this way, his faith would have been shattered to its foundations."As I was still sceptical, Bhagavan asked me to read a verse from the *Gita* which meant: Knowledge should be given according to one's ability to grasp it. If we teach philosophy to those who are not ready to receive it, their faith will

be destroyed.

In 1945, Bhagavan told Dilip Kumar Roy [No.8] that *bhakti* is the mother of *jnana*. When a follower of the *bhakti marga* declares that *bhakti* is the best, he really means by the word *bhakti* what the *jnana marga* man calls *jnana*. There is no difference in the state, or its description by attributes or transcendence of attributes. Only, different thinkers have used different words.

A few days later, Roy asked Bhagavan, "What is the best way of killing the ego?" Bhagavan replied, "To ask the mind to kill the mind is like making the thief the policeman. He will go with you and pretend to catch the thief but nothing would be gained. So you must turn inward and see from where does the mind arise and then it will cease to exist."

When the mother's temple was being built, there was an acute shortage of funds.The *sarvadhikari* wanted me and Chhaganlal Yogi [Next entry] to visit Jamana Lal Bajaj[2] in Bombay for a donation of Rs.50,000. This needed Bhagavan's clearance, for which he had no courage. I collected some devotees and went to Bhagavan to get his permission. We stood before him for some time, but he did not even bother to look at us. Each one of us wanted the others to speak. When we asked, he made no reply for a long time. At last, he turned to us and said, "I have already told you not to beg in my name. Now I am telling you again. Be satisfied with what you have. Did all these buildings in the Ashram come up as a result of my begging? It all happened in the way it had to happen. Nothing happens purely as a result of personal efforts."

We were all worried about Bhagavan's health, particularly in the last few years of his life, but Bhagavan himself was indifferent to the various pains and problems that his body had attracted. If he had any concern at all, it was that his assorted body problems might be an inconvenience to the devotees who came to see him.

In* The Mountain Path *of October 1966, T.P. Ramachandra Iyer records as follows:

My special subject in college was philosophy. Once, when I entered the hall a discussion was going on about the nature of Self. Book learning being fresh to my mind, I began to express what I had read about the various grades of consciousness in the Western system. I particularly mentioned the terms superconscious and subconscious. Bhagavan listened and reactedly sharply: It is only with reference to something that you can postulate a 'super' or 'sub' state to it. Consciousness being Truth, any

postulations of it are the creation of ignorance, clouding the mind but appealing to the intellect. Truth is simple and direct, it knows no variations. What exists is Consciousness, call it by any name, Self, *Atman, Brahman.*

I not only heard the words of Bhagavan but experienced something else also. I felt and experienced my nature, dived deep into my consciousness and swam in the ocean of bliss. I fell prostrate before Bhagavan and cried aloud within myself: "O Bhagavan! My Master! Dispeller of my darkness! Obeisance to you! Accept me as your servant!"

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1. *Refer* last two paras at p.120.
2. The promoter of the Bajaj Group of companies in India. A rich businessman who devoted his life to the service of Mahatma Gandhi.

55

Chhaganlal V. Yogi was a businessman of Bombay who authored *Sri Ramana Mahima.* He first visited Sri Ramana in 1939.

When I was eighteen, I read a lot of books by Swami Vivekananda and Swami Ramtirtha. These implanted in me the ideal of plain living, high thinking and life dedicated to spiritual matters. At the age of twenty I had the good fortune of contacting Mahatma Gandhi. His ideals won my heart and for several years I faithfully tried to put them into practice. At the age of thirty eight scepticism began to assail me and I began to doubt the ideals of Gandhiji. It was in this period of my life that I heard of Ramana Maharshi.

One day, while travelling as usual on the train to the office, I happened to meet a friend who told me that he recently had been to Sri Ramanasramam. I said, "I have an utter contempt for these so-called saints." My friend refused to give up. He insisted on impressing on me that Ramana Maharshi was not a 'so-called' saint, but a genuine and authentic sage. He gave me a book entitled *Sri Maharshi* written by Kamath, editor of *The Sunday Times* in Madras.

I must confess, despite my prejudices, the book evoked in me an interest in the Maharshi and I was sufficiently curious to borrow from a friend his biography *Self-Realization* by B.V Narasimha Swami. My interest in Sri Ramana began to grow without my being aware of it. Later, I felt compelled to write to Sri Ramanasramam and got all the literature on

the Maharshi that was available in English.

On my first visit to the Ashram, I found Sri Ramana seated on a couch, as quiet and unmoving as a statue. His presence did not seem to emanate anything unusual and I was very disappointed to discover that he displayed no interest in me. I had expected warmth and intimacy, but unfortunately I seemed to be in the presence of someone who lacked both. From morning till evening I sat waiting to catch a glimpse of his grace, of his interest in me, a stranger who had come all the way from Bombay, but I evoked no response. After pinning such high hopes on him, his apparent lack of interest nearly broke my heart. Eventually, I decided to leave the Ashram. My mind, which was deeply tormented, felt that the psychic atmosphere in the hall was stuffy and choking. Unable to bear it any longer, I walked outside to get a breath of fresh air.

A young man called Gopalan came up to me and asked where I had come from. "Bombay", I replied. He asked me if I had been introduced to the Master and led me to the office and then proceeded with me to the hall where he introduced me to Bhagavan. The Maharshi sent for a copy of the Gujarati translation of the *Upadesa Saaram* by Kishorelal Mashruwala, and asked me to chant verses from the book. While chanting, I could feel Bhagavan keenly observing me. **It seemed that the light of his eyes was suffusing my consciousness. Even without my being aware of it his silent gaze brought about a subtle but definite transformation in me.** My erstwhile sadness completely disappeared leaving in my heart an inexplicable emotion of joy.

That evening I sat close to Bhagavan in the dining room. **In my exalted state the food I ate seemed to have an unusual and unearthly taste. I quite literally felt that I was participating in some heavenly meal in the direct presence of God.**

During the three days of my stay in the proximity of the Divine Master, I found my whole outlook entirely changed. After that short period, I could find little evidence of my old self, a self that had been tied down with all kinds of preconceptions and prejudices. I felt that I had lost the chains that bind the eyes of true vision. I became aware that the whole texture of my mind had undergone a change. **The divine magician opened up for me a strange new world of illumination, hope and joy. I felt that his presence on earth alone constituted sufficient proof that humanity, suffering and wounded because of its obstinate ignorance, could be uplifted and saved. For the first time I fully understood the significance of *darshan*.**

At one time I felt that my political duty as a Gandhian demanded

that I should court arrest on the call of Mahatma Gandhi. But my domestic duties bade me otherwise. I found myself in a dilemma and I could not see the way out. The situation was so unbearable for me that I had to turn to the Master for help and relief. I therefore set out for Tiruvannamalai.

After reaching there I went and sat in the holy presence of the Master. While sitting, I began to wonder how to place the difficulty before him. I decided to pour forth my prayer from the heart with a silent plea for Bhagavan's help. I began to pray, and while I concentrated on my mental plea, I watched his radiant face and sparkling eyes that were full of love and kindness. And then, astonishingly, something like a miracle began to happen. Bhagavan's face transformed itself into that of Mahatma Gandhi, while his body remained the same. As I stared at it with awe and wonder, the two faces, those of Bhagavan and Gandhiji began to appear to me alternately in quick succession. I felt my heart filling with joy. Yet, at the same time, I was wondering whether what I saw was real or not.

I turned my eyes away from Bhagavan and looked around me to see if others were seeing what I saw. Seeing no sign of wonder on their faces, I concluded that what I saw was a picture of my own imagination. I closed my eyes and sat quietly for sometime. Then, as I began to look at Bhagavan's face, the vision immediately reappeared, but this time, in addition to the faces of Bhagavan and Gandhiji, those of Krishna, the Buddha, Kabir, Ramdas and a host of other saints began to show themselves in quick succession. All my doubts vanished and I began to enjoy that grand divine show. The vision lasted about five minutes. My mind dropped all its worries and I found myself able to handover my problem to the capable hands of the Master. Though he spoke no words to me, it came to pass that the problem was solved without infringing either of my two duties. In fact, both duties were fulfilled satisfactorily.

In 1945, I decided to wind up my printing press in Bombay and settle down at Sri Ramanasramam. I had no prearranged plan for closing down my business. I merely relied on Bhagavan. One day, in the early hours of the morning, while I was still in bed and only half awake, I saw a vision in which Bhagavan appeared before me. By his side stood a gentleman whom I recognised as a friend of mine. He had neither been to the Ashram nor had he ever exhibited any faith in Bhagavan. The following conversation took place between Bhagavan and me.

Bhagavan: You want to sell your press, don't you?

Me: Yes Bhagavan, but I must find a buyer.

Bhagavan: Showing my friend standing by my side – 'Here is the buyer. He will buy your press, so sell it to him.'
Me: Since Bhagavan has been kind enough to show me the buyer; may he also favour me by stating the price at which I should execute the sale? Bhagavan then showed me a five-digit figure on the opposite wall shining as a neon sign. The amount indicated was reasonable.

Bhagavan and my friend then disappeared and the vision ended. By itself the vision was astonishing enough, but there was more to come. When I entered the press that day at 11 a.m., my friend from the vision was waiting for me. Of course, he had come to see me about some other work and had no idea that he had been singled out as a prospective buyer. Feeling that Bhagavan had sent him to me, I told him about the vision I had a few hours before. He listened to me very attentively.

When I had finished my tale, he simply commented, "I will buy your press at the price indicated by your guru." There was no limit to my joy. My desire to sell was fulfilled by his grace and the sale was completed in less than a minute.

My original plan was to dispose of my printing press in Bombay and move to Sri Ramanasramam. However, when the devotees heard what I was planning to do, it was suggested to me that I could be of more use to the Ashram in Bangalore. I was asked to start a printing press there that could execute all printing work of the Ashram. I agreed to the idea and soon found myself in Bangalore, looking for suitable premises. I began to suspect that Bhagavan had assisted the sale of my original press because he had work for me to do in Bangalore.

Though a stranger in the city, I could soon locate an old press that had been lying idle for some months. It was for sale. I saw its proprietor and told him why I wished to buy the press. He agreed to sell but we were unable to finalise the price. To break the deadlock, I proposed that both of us would visit the Ashram and talk about the deal after Bhagavan's *darshan*. I thought that since Bhagavan wanted me to do his work in Bangalore his *darshan* might help to lubricate the wheels of the transaction.

The owner having agreed to the idea, we set off together for the Ashram. On our arrival, I took him into the holy presence of Bhagavan and informed him that I proposed to buy the press of the gentleman who was accompanying me, and that I planned to do all the Ashram's printing work there. Bhagavan did not say anything; he nodded his head.

Within a few hours of having had Bhagavan's *darshan,* there was a wonderful change in the attitude of the owner of the press. He approached

me and agreed to sell his press for whatever price I was willing to pay for it. When he had agreed to come and see Bhagavan with me he had made a stipulation that no business talk should take place at the Ashram. However, after seeing Bhagavan, he proposed that we settle our business immediately. We drafted and signed a sale agreement in the Ashram itself, and within a week of our visit the press came into my possession.

The new firm was named 'Aruna Press' by Bhagavan himself. The press needed a lot of attention to get it functioning again. And by Bhagavan's grace I was soon able to take up the Ashram work as assigned to me.

In 1946, the devotees proposed to bring out the *Golden Jubilee Souvenir* to mark fifty years of Bhagavan's arrival at Arunachala. Its printing was entrusted to my press. Up till then, the press had only printed small books for the Ashram. Since this was going to be a big volume of several hundred pages, I was reluctant to accept the job because I felt I would not have time to complete the job in time for the jubilee celebrations on 1st September. However, eventually I accepted the job.

At first, my fears appeared to be justified. Up till ten days before the target date, I could manage to print only a small part of the book. I lost courage, rushed to the Ashram, prostrated before Bhagavan and told him, "Unless the help of some other press is taken, the volume will not come out on the first of September." I then sat before him, enjoying his *darshan*, waiting for his reply. After a few moments of silence he said in a low melodious tone, "Do your work."

These three simple words had a magical effect on me. They fired me with fresh vim and vigour, and there arose in my heart a strong belief that the volume would surely be out on the scheduled date. I had received the order from my Master; I had simply to obey and 'do my work'. I had faith that other details would be looked after by Bhagavan.

I returned to Bangalore and told the story of my encounter to my co-workers. All of them accepted Bhagavan's order in the same spirit as I had done. For the next few days all of us worked day and night with full faith, zeal and enthusiasm. The amount of work turned out in those few days was, in retrospect, simply astonishing. When only three days were left for the deadline, a party of about ten devotees came to my house on its way to the Ashram. They were going to Tiruvannamalai to attend the Golden Jubilee Celebrations.Three of them turned out to be expert bookbinders. I immediately enlisted their help and managed to complete the work of the *Souvenir* a day before the deadline.

Between 1945 and 1947, the Aruna Press printed all publications

of Sri Ramanasramam. The work was complex and I often found myself having to argue with the person at the Ashram, who had been put in charge of the publications. The tension between us increased to the point where both of us decided to go to Bhagavan to get our differences resolved.

Bhagavan's rest interval between noon and 2.30 p.m. was chosen for the meeting because we wanted to be alone with him. We went to the hall and waited for him to return from lunch. He saw both of us waiting for him. Sensing that we had some business to discuss, he took his seat. Both of us then placed our cases before him. He quietly listened and gave his verdict in the language of silence. Smiling with great charm he maintained complete silence both during and after the presentation of the arguments. The judgement was the best possible for both of us.

Bhagavan's silence healed the breach. Emerging from the hall both of us had a spontaneous impulse to embrace each other. In those few minutes our hearts had changed. We separated with the resolve to bury the past and to treat each other with love and friendship.The silken tie with which Bhagavan bound us on that day never snapped again.

Bhagavan's language was that of silence. Once a Collector and a Deputy Collector came for his *darshan*.The Collector narrated at length the *sadhanas* he had done and all the spiritual literature he had read. After him the Deputy Collector told his equally long story. Bhagavan continued to remain in silence even after the speeches were over. The Collector said in an aggrieved voice, "We have been speaking for a long time. Please tell us something. Anything, however brief, will do."

Bhagavan spoke saying, "All this time I have been speaking to you, in my own language. What can I do if you won't listen to it?"The Collector, an intelligent man, caught the meaning of Bhagavan's cryptic reply. Suddenly overpowered by devotion, he fell at his feet. Both the visitors sat before Bhagavan in silent meditation. They got the peace they were looking for and departed satisfied.

Bhagavan used to say, "The state that is beyond speech and thought is called *mauna*. Silence is eternal speech. It is the perpetual flow of language; it is the supreme language."

Bhagavan was undoubtedly one of those rare *mahatmas* who had the power to banish the suffering through his presence, merely through giving *darshan*.

56

Lakshmana Swami belonged to Gudur, Andhra Pradesh. When he arrived at the Ashram in the later half of 1949, he was fully ready for the divine spark.

I was brought up in my paternal grandfather's house at Gudur. My father had died when I was less than two years old. In my seventeenth year, while still at school, an inexplicable incident changed my life.While sleeping in my family's house, an unknown malevolent force appeared to descend on me. I woke up with a tremendous pressure bearing down on my chest. I felt that some unknown evil force was trying to kill me. Immediately and spontaneously the words 'Rama' 'Rama' erupted from within me with a great roaring sound. I did not decide to say these words; they just naturally burst out of me with great force. The evil presence vanished. I had never repeated this mantra before, nor had it occurred to me that this mantra had any power. Concluding that there must be some power in the mantra, I began to repeat it on a regular basis. At the same time I also started doing *pranayama.*

Soon after this strange incident my lifestyle began to change. I started getting up at 3 a.m. and spend many hours in meditation. After I passed my final school exam, I decided to go for higher studies at Nellore, about 24 miles from Gudur. In the summer vacation of the college I returned to Gudur, where I had my first major spiritual experience. Here I had found a dried-up lakebed as a good place for my *pranayama.*

One evening, while I began my usual *pranayama* sitting in *padmasana,* the mind suddenly became concentrated and utterly still. There was a flash of light which encircled and engulfed me and within a few seconds I lost all consciousness of the body. The effulgence of *atman* within impressed on me the fact that *atman* is God Himself in the physical body. My joy knew no bounds. The experience was brief . I tried on many occasions to repeat the experience but failed. I came to the conclusion that a guru in human form was necessary to bring about realisation.

On the last day of my second year at the college, I saw a large crowd congregated in the main lecture hall. I was not able to enter the hall as it was crowded. But looking over the heads of the students from the back of the hall, I could see the lecture being given by my English professor [G.V. Subbaramayya, no.41]. He was pointing to a portrait on the platform

and saying that the sage in the picture was Ramana Maharshi. Up till that moment I had never heard of the Maharshi. However, as soon as I heard the name, I felt an irrepressible longing to see him.

While returning home by train the following day, I saw a small booklet *Sri Ramana Maharshi* at the bookstore on the platform. I eagerly purchased it. On the first page of the book I read the famous verse composed by the Maharshi himself, the first line of which was: "In the interior of the Heart cave the one Supreme Being *Brahman* shines as 'I-I', verily the *Atman*." This verse made a deep and immediate impression on me.

Towards the end of 1948, I worked as a clerk-typist for about five months in a local mica company because my family needed money. I had no interest in the job, from which I resigned in the beginning of 1949 after persuading my mother to accompany me on a trip to Sri Ramanasramam.

While waiting to board the train to Tiruvannamalai, my mother started talking to two women and discovered that they were also heading for the Ashram accompanied by Satyananda Swami, a long-time devotee of the Maharshi.We were invited to join the party. Because we had arrived with a devotee well-known to the Ashram management, there was no problem in getting accommodation; but speaking to Bhagavan proved to be difficult due to a large number of people always around him.

One day I saw Bhagavan sitting on a bench outside the hall, listening to a group of Brahmins chant from the Vedas. As I looked at the scene in front of me, the world completely lost its solid, substantial reality. I became aware that everything I perceived in that scene was nothing more than a dream-like projection. As I gazed at the scene I had the knowledge and the experience that the real Ramana Maharshi was not the body I saw before me, it was the formless effulgent Self that I had experienced on the dried-up lakebed in Gudur.

I stayed only for three days on this first visit, but it was enough to convince me that in the Maharshi I had found the guru I had been seeking. I decided to change my *japa* from '*Hare* Rama' to '*Hare* Ramana'; since I felt that I could avail of my guru's grace by chanting his name. After three days, I left my mother at the Ashram and went back to Gudur to devote myself wholly to meditation.

I decided to go to a village about 15 miles from Gudur, where my relatives helped me to build a small hut in a quiet spot. The constant repetition of the guru's name made my mind very quiet. On a few occasions it became absolutely still. When this happened, the question 'Who am I?' would spontaneously arise inside me, and, as if in answer to the question, my

mind would automatically sink at its source, the Heart, and I experienced the bliss of the Self.

At the end of about five months in the village, I was down with severe malaria and had to be taken to Gudur, where the doctor declared that I was likely to die. I, however, had a strong determination that I would not die until I had seen my guru again. I placed a picture of Bhagavan by my bedside and meditated on it throughout the ordeal. Whenever I looked at the picture I felt as if Bhagavan was laughing or smiling at me. I am convinced that it was the power and grace of Bhagavan that kept me alive and enabled me to make a full recovery within two months.

I arrived at Sri Ramanasramam during the *navaratri* celebrations of 1949. In the afternoon of the *Vijayadasmi* day, I stood in front of the Mother's shrine [*See* photograph no. 16 in the book], waiting for Bhagavan to appear. He came accompanied by Swami Satyananda, entered the new hall [Attached to the Mother's shrine], and took his seat on the stone sofa. I went up to him and made a full prostration. When I stood up, he looked intently at me for a few moments. I withdrew and sat near a pillar outside the hall where I could do Self-enquiry undisturbed.

Bhagavan could still see me from where he was sitting. Shortly afterwards, I saw Muruganar taking a seat close to Bhagavan. After a few minutes Muruganar came and sat down next to me. A few other devotees came and sat near us. I closed my eyes and began meditation on 'Who am I?'

Within a few minutes, the gracious smiling face of Bhagavan appeared within me on the right side of the chest. There was something like a lightning flash that resulted in a flood of divine light shining both within and without. Bhagavan's face was still smiling on the right side of the chest. It seemed to be lit up with radiance that exceeded innumerable lightning flashes rolled into one. The bliss and joy these experiences gave brought tears to my eyes. Finally, the internal picture of Bhagavan disappeared and the Self absorbed my whole being.

I remained in that state without body consciousness for about three hours. The experience was so intense that even when I opened my eyes I found myself incapable of either speaking or moving. I remained where I was for another three hours because I was incapable of movement of any kind. At about 9 p.m. I rose to my feet and very slowly made my way back to my allotted place in the men's dormitory of the Ashram.

Next day afternoon I went up to Sri Bhagavan, prostrated before him and handed him a note via his attendant Venkataratnam. The note,

which I had written in Telugu said, "Bhagavan, in your presence and by the quest [Who am I?] I have realised the Self." He read the note, looked at me for a moment, and then his face lit up in a radiant smile. For sometime we looked at each other. Then he broke the silence by asking me where I had come from. "Gudur", I replied. "That is in Nellore district, isn't it?" Enquired Bhagavan. "Yes!" I answered. This was the only conversation I ever had with Bhagavan. After giving him those two brief replies, I didn't speak again for another 13 years.[1]

As accommodation was in short supply at the Ashram, I found a small thatched house about 250 yards from the Ashram. I shared it with a boy called Raghavan, who was already living there. Since I had money and he didn't, he agreed to do all the cooking for me.

One of the first people to visit my new house was Venkataratnam, Bhagavan's attendant. On his first visit he said, "In all the years I have been Bhagavan's attendant, I have never seen anyone present a note like this. I am experienced enough in the ways of Bhagavan to know that the beaming smile he immediately gave you was proof that the claim was genuine. He made no comment to me about your note and the message it contained, but he did ask me to check up on you to make sure that your needs are being taken care of and that you are properly looked after." From that day on, Venkataratnam became a regular visitor. He would come and sit with me whenever his services were not required in the Ashram.

Though I never sought to attract Bhagavan's attention, he always seemed to know if I was in vicinity, even if he couldn't see me. On one occasion, when he was giving *darshan* in the new hall, his view of me was completely blocked by a newspaper that one of his attendants was holding. He asked the attendant to remove the newspaper and then beamed his usual smile at me.

On the evening of April 14, 1950, I was cleaning my room in Palakottu [2] when a picture of Bhagavan kept on a stool in the corner of the room fell to the ground. I put it back in its usual place, making sure that it did not fall again. A few minutes later it fell to the ground for a second time. I intuitively felt it as a sign that Sri Bhagavan was dead or dying. I had a strong urge to go to the Ashram, but could not leave as I became wholly absorbed in the Self for a period of about two hours. Consciousness returned shortly before 9 p.m., when I heard a great noise coming from the Ashram. I knew for certain that Bhagavan was no more. I rushed to the Ashram only to find that Bhagavan had attained *mahasamadhi*.

I had seen Bhagavan for the last time earlier that day. On that occasion, as we looked into each other's eyes, I experienced a strong wave of ecstatic bliss and I became completely oblivious of my surroundings.

I spent a total of seven months in Palakottu, mostly just sitting quietly in my room. Towards the end of this period my skin turned yellow. Around November 1950, I finally decided that I would accept my brother's offer to go back to Gudur to let my family look after me.[3]

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1. David Godman says that once he asked Lakshmana Swami why he had remained silent for so long. He replied, "The experience of Self is beyond words and speech. It is impossible to explain it or talk about it. Since there was nothing I could say about it, I kept quiet." (*The Power Of The Presence*, part-II, p.222.)
2. A colony abutting on the Ashram.
3. David Godman states that Lakshmana Swami spent most of his next three years (after November 1950) in *samadhi* living in a small hut his family built for him. Because of his ascetic lifestyle, sitting in *padmasana* for 20 hours a day and rarely eating, he attracted a large following. From the mid 1950s on, he lived a secluded life in a house near Gudur that had been provided for him by a devotee. He began meeting people on a regular basis in the 1960s, but always preferred to live a private, solitary life. Around 1990 he moved back to Tiruvannamalai. His biography *Yogeeswara Sri Lakshmana* is written by Ramana Das.

57

Viswanatha Swami (1904-79), a distant relative of Sri Ramana, was brought up by the Maharshi's mother. He fully surrendered himself to Sri Ramana in 1923 and till 1950 spent most of his time either with the Maharshi or with Ganapati Muni (no. 91). He was a scholar of Tamil and Sanskrit and translated many Ashram publications into Tamil. He edited *The Mountain Path* for some time and authored the famous *Ramana Ashtotra*.

In my first *darshan* of Bhagavan at the Skandasram the very sight of him thrilled me. Something very subtle, seemingly with its centre in that body, shone forth, without limitation, engulfing everything else. I felt swallowed by it. I stayed for a week with Bhagavan in that atmosphere of utter purity and serenity. I saw in Bhagavan something quite arresting,

which clearly distinguished him from all others I had seen. **He seemed to live apart from the physical frame, quite detached from it. His look and smile had a remarkable spiritual charm. When he spoke, the words seemed to come out of an abyss. One could see immaculate purity and non-attachment in him and in his movements. I sensed something very lofty and sacred about him. In his vicinity, mind's distractions were overpowered by an austere and potent calmness. In his presence the unique bliss of peace was directly experienced.** This I would call Ramana *lahari* – 'the blissful atmosphere of Ramana'. In this ecstasy of grace one loses one's sense of separate individuality and there remains something grand and all pervading, all devouring.

Some of the ten devotees living with Bhagavan at the Skandasram used to sing Tamil songs in praise of Subramaniam.[Son of Lord Siva.] Bhagavan used to keep time by tapping with two small sticks on the two rings of an iron brazier in front of him. While Bhagavan's hands were tapping, his unfathomable look of grace gave a glimpse of the beyond in silence. It was an unforgettable experience.

One morning, a devotee was singing with great fervour 'Ramana *sadguru*, Ramana *sadguru,* Ramana *sadguru rayane.'* [Sri Ramana is the true Master and our Lord.] When Bhagavan also joined in the singing, the devotees were amused and began to laugh. Bhagavan then commented, "What is extraordinary about it? Why should one limit Ramana to a form of six feet? Is it not the all-pervading divinity that you adore when you sing 'Ramana *sadguru,* Ramana *sadguru*?' Why should I not join in the singing?" We instantly felt ourselves in agreement with Bhagavan.

Once when Niranjanananda Swami told Bhagavan that I could recite hymns in Sanskrit, he looked at me expectantly and I had to recite a few verses. When I had finished, Bhagavan gently looked at me and said, "You have learned all this. Not so in my case. Before I came here I knew nothing and had learned nothing. Some mysterious power took possession of me and effected a thorough transformation."

Once I asked Bhagavan as to how I could rise above my animal existence. He replied with great compassion, "It is only by awakening a power mightier than the senses and the mind that these can be subdued. If you awaken and nurture the growth of that power within you, everything will be conquered. One should sustain the current of meditation uninterruptedly. Moderation in food and similar restraints will be helpful in maintaining the inner poise." He added, "So long as you identify yourself with the body, you can never escape sex thoughts and distractions."

Bhagavan was opposed to any sort of waste or extravagance. Once he scolded me for wasting kerosene in lighting the charcoal stove, when the same results could be got with dry twigs and leaves lying around. On another occasion, while visiting Ganapati Muni's room at Palakottu where I was also staying, Bhagavan saw scraps of paper of about 1" x 6" size on the floor, which were leftovers from cutting some sheets of paper to a uniform size. He wanted to stitch these pieces together and make a little notebook of the size of a thumb and use it for writing something on. To save Bhagavan the trouble, I offered to do it myself. Later, he was happy to see 108 verses of the *Indra Sahasra Nama Stotra*, copied in the tiny notebook. Bhagavan scrutinized not only the contents of the notebook but also its stitching and general appearance, as was his way. He then exclaimed with pleasure, "You have kept your promise and made the best use of the bits of paper."

V. Mani Iyer, a senior schoolmate of Bhagavan, noted for his physical strength and rough dealing with anybody whom he disliked, was known as 'Rogue Mani'. He accompanied his mother to Tirupati. She wanted to break her journey at Tiruvannamalai for Bhagavan's *darshan,* while going back home to Madurai. Mani agreed on the condition that he should be allowed to drag the bogus *sadhu* by the ear and bring him back home.

However, on reaching the Virupaksha Cave, Mani looked and looked at Bhagavan, and got more and more puzzled as he did so. There was no trace of the ordinary boy Venkataraman whom he had known. He saw an effulgent Divine Being seated in front of him, absolutely still and silent. His heart melted for the first time in his life, tears rolled down his cheeks and the hair stood on end. He fell prostrate before Bhagavan and surrendered to him. He became a frequent visitor and a staunch devotee of Bhagavan.

Those who were spiritually evolved had no difficulty in recognising Bhagavan's state. One such person was Narayana Guru of Kerala. He once visited Bhagavan at the Skandasram. At lunch time Bhagavan invited him to eat with him and other devotees. After reaching Kerala, he wrote five verses in Sanskrit, calling them *Nirvritti Panchakam*, describing Bhagavan's way of obtaining the inner felicity and sent them to Bhagavan. In later years, Narayana Guru used to be greatly pleased whenever his disciples visited Bhagavan, and on their return he would listen with delight to details of their visit.

58

Ramanatha Brahmachari, a student of the Veda *Pathasala* (school) in Tiruvannamalai had a strong yearning for God. In 1912, when he heard about the Maharshi, he went to the Virupaksha Cave to see him. It was a defining moment in his life; one look from the Maharshi stopped his mind and captured his heart. He gave up his family to be with the Maharshi. When the news of his death reached the Ashram in 1946, Tamil verses from *Ramana Stotra Anubhuti* were being sung before the Maharshi, who said with some feeling, "Look! These are verses written by Ramanatha himself." Brief extracts from this 32-verse *Stotra*, reflect Brahmachari's sentiments and emotions about the Maharshi.

The moment compassionate Ramana, who is God Subramaniam, came and manifested in my heart, the bondage-producing evil *karma* was destroyed and my *anubhuti* [experience] arose.

I had evil *karma* and did not know of any refuge. I was ignorant and totally worthless; even so, he established me in the blissful ocean of silence, the indescribable treasure of grace, severing all bonds.

Ramana who abides as embodiment of grace, granted me the state that is totally free of ignorance in order to destroy the disease of the mind which assumes the form of delusion, taking sense objects and their enjoyment to be real.

My Lord at Arunachala stands alone as the human embodiment of the fire of knowledge. With his feet as the raft to cross the ocean of *samsara* which only causes trouble, he put me ashore.

Jnani – who made me rest, without letting me return to the forest of delusion in which I was wandering, brother of the one who destroys the family of sorrows [Reference to Ganapati], you are the inner light of those who are intent upon merging with you, get to see!

The one who reigns over me is the Guru-Lord, the Lord who has the form of the formless heart, the Lord who gives the bliss of the Self shining within, and the incomparable Lord of this poor one.

The transmuting glance of the sage of Arunachala penetrated my heart in a way that I, a worthless soul without true love, was redeemed completely.

Venkata! You are the one who is both with form and formless, the

shining Guru, the dweller in the Heart-cave. You are the mountain of virtues, the expanding space of consciousness which is awesome like an ocean.

59

Mastan, a Muslim, was a weaver by profession. Highly spiritual, he made cloth for Sri Ramana's use. He was drawn to the Maharshi by Akhilandamma (no. 46) along with whom he saw the Maharshi for the first time in 1914.

When I came to Bhagavan, he was seated like a rock. His unwavering gaze was filled with grace, compassion and steady wisdom. I stood by his side. **After giving me a look, he opened the gate of my Heart and I was established in his state.** I stood like that for eight hours without fatigue, filled with total absorption and peace. Bhagavan in those days used to open our Heart with a simple gracious look, which transformed us. There was no need for any questions since he made us, by his look, like himself.

Akilandamma, who probably knew Mastan better than anyone else, says:

Mastan and I would come to Arunachala from our village, 40 miles from Tiruvannamalai, to have the pleasure of serving Bhagavan. A man of whims, Mastan would suddenly suspend his weaving and go to live with Bhagavan for months on end. During this period he would keep his body and soul together on alms that he begged. Bhagavan once observed, "Mastan's craft did not give food either to him or his parents but gave me clothes."

Once a mongoose larger than the ordinary size, of golden hue [not grey as a mongoose is], made straight for Bhagavan. It sat on his lap for a while. Later, it wandered around and closely inspected different parts of the cave and then disappeared into the bushes on the hill. Mastan being afraid that the mongoose might harm the peacocks was ready with a stick in case it made an attack. Addressing Mastan, Bhagavan said, "Who do you think he was? Do you think you could have caught him? He was a sage of Arunachala who took on this form to visit me. How many times I told you that sages come to see me in various forms."

60

Echammal and Mudaliar Patti (no. 61) are remembered since they both served food to Sri Ramana everyday from the first decade of the last century until they passed away in the 1940s. Even when the ladies grew old and the Ashram kitchen facilities expanded, they could not be dissuaded from bringing food, and personally serving Sri Ramana.

Echammal (Lakshmi Ammal) was native of a village near Tiruvannamalai. In a flood of misfortunes, her husband, her son and two daughters died in quick succession. She had an inner confidence that a guru could put an end to her sorrow.

On the advice of her relatives and friends, she went to see Sri Ramana and stayed there for an hour. The Maharshi said nothing to her, but in his presence all her sorrows melted away. From that day on, Bhagavan attracted her like a magnet. She visited the cave repeatedly and began to take food offering to Bhagavan. Initially, her father supplied her funds. Later on her brother also made some contributions.

Once Echammal was going up the hill with her food basket. She met a party of pilgrims returning with a sad look, as they could not find the Maharshi in the cave. Promising to show them Bhagavan, she took them with her. They were utterly amazed on seeing Bhagavan whom they had seen earlier in a *kaupina* working alone at raising a mud wall. Mistaking Sri Ramana for a labourer, they had asked him, "Where is the Swami?" Bhagavan, it seems, had replied, "I do not know." When Echammal, after their departure, remonstrated with Bhagavan for having misled the poor pilgrims, Bhagavan replied, "What can I do? Do you want me to tie a placard round my head announcing that I am Ramana Maharshi?"

61

Mudaliar Patti and her family were greatly devoted to a saint who before his death told Mudaliar Patti and her son Subbiah that a great fortune was awaiting them at Tiruvannamalai, where they would have *darshan* of a *jnani* and also a great opportunity to serve him.

When Subbiah got up after prostrating before Bhagavan, he experienced a peace and bliss that he never had before. In 1909, the family rented a house in Tiruvannamalai and Mudaliar Patti started getting food to Bhagavan everyday. By the time she died in 1949, she had brought or sent food continuously to Bhagavan, without missing a single day, for forty years. Even when the Ashram expanded to the point when hundreds of meals could be cooked everyday, she contributed her mite, and Bhagavan always insisted on having some of it on his plate, and would not eat before Patti's offering had arrived.

On one occasion the Maharshi told Mudaliar Patti that she was serving him more food than he could eat. She retorted with great familiarity that she was doing nothing of the sort and shoved another handful on Bhagavan's leaf-plate, remarking, "It is all a matter of mind, isn't it?" Laughingly, the Maharshi confessed defeat and remarked, "She is paying me back in my own coin."

After losing her eyesight Patti expressed a wish to see Bhagavan. When a devotee led her to Bhagavan's presence, someone nearby asked, "Granny, you have no eyesight to see Bhagavan, why did you come?" Her faith-filled reply was, "It does't matter if I can't see Bhagavan's body, my body can be seen by him, and that is more than enough for me."

After her death, at Bhagavan's instance her body was not taken to the cremation ground but buried within the compound of her house, which was not far from the Ashram. Her body was made to sit cross-legged in *padmasana*, as it is done with the bodies of *sannaysis*. It was garlanded, sprinkled with sacred ash and camphor and buried. In no other case had Bhagavan intervened in this way, whenever anyone of his devotees died.

Many years after her death, someone purchased her house. Having got the advice that a *samadhi* in the compound would be inauspicious, the new owner dug up Patti's body, cut up its remains and scattered them a long distance away from his land. Sometime later, the new owner was killed in a train accident, the impact of which was so severe that his body got cut into several pieces.

62

Krishna Bhikshu (Voruganti Krishnayya) had a degree in law but he rarely practised, and preferred to devote his life to spiritual pursuits. He authored *Ramana Leela*, an authoritative biography of Sri Ramana in Telugu, and *Ramana Yoga Sutras*, which contains teachings of the Maharshi. He was also attracted to Sri Aurobindo, but in 1931 he finally decided that Sri Ramana was the guru he had been seeking.

When in Madras preparing for my law degree, I met Ganapati Muni [No. 91] whose very appearance was striking. "If the man is so great, how much greater must be his master," I thought. I went to Sri Ramanasramam with a friend. As we arrived, Bhagavan was washing his hands after the meals. Looking at us lovingly and earnestly, he enquired, "Have you had your food yet?" To our reply that we had it in the town, he said, "You could have had it here."

The three days' stay made a great impression on me. I considered Sri Ramana to be a real Mahatma. I went to Benaras for a month, returned to Pondicherry and spent five months there. Wherever I would go people would find some fault or the other with me. Only Bhagavan asked for nothing, and found fault with nothing. As a matter of fact, there was nothing in me which entitled me to his grace. But this did not matter with Bhagavan. He wanted me, not my goodness. It was enough to tell him 'I am yours', for him to do the rest. In that way he was unsurpassed.

To me Bhagavan was always a great and fatherly man. I trusted him completely. He guided and I followed. I knew I was in safe hands and I was well looked after. I just loved him with the whole of my being and lived my life by his side, eating in the same room, sleeping in the same hall, chatting and joking, but all the time being tied fast to him by his immense love and attention. I am saying this without pride for, as he was to me, so was he to all. Everybody felt connected to Bhagavan in some special, indescribable way that was somehow unique. We all felt special. Bhagavan loved us all, but each one differently.

With him I was like a child with his mother – completely safe, completely happy. Whenever in difficulty, I turned to him and he would solve my problem with ease. Even when I was away from him, it was enough for me to utter 'Ramana' and I felt his helping hand, which would

banish all my troubles, internal and external. What attention I got whenever I went to the Ashram! He would ask me where I made my bed, what I used for a pillow and so on. (We used to have blocks of wood for pillows because they kept the head cool in the steamy summer nights.)

During one of my early visits to the Ashram, he had encouraged me to carry on repeating the *Gayatri* mantra, since I had been repeating it in the past. After sometime I asked, "Am I expected to know the meaning of the mantra, and meditate on it?" He said, "I have only asked you to see who is repeating the *Gayatri* or who is the one doing *japa*." By making me look for the one who was doing the *japa*, he was subtly and slowly turning me towards the practice of self-enquiry.

Nobody could correctly guess the way Bhagavan would meet or treat people. The high and mighty of the land might not even get a blank look, while some insignificant wanderer would become the object of his concentrated attention for hours or even days. Once Pranavananda Swami [No.130] came to the Ashram. Being utterly exhausted he sat on the steps. When Bhagavan was told about it, he came out, sat at the feet of Pranavananda and started rubbing his legs, saying, "You had a long way to walk *tata,*[1] your legs must be paining very much." The old swami protested in vain. Bhagavan had his way and massaged the swami's feet. Nobody knew what great merit the old man had amassed to be the recipient of this great fortune.

At meal time Bhagavan would ask to be served very little, and he would carefully clear the leaf-plate of the last grain of food before getting up. I once remarked, "If we clear our dining leaves so scrupulously, the dogs, cats, monkeys, rats and ants will starve." Bhagavan's response was, "If you are so compassionate, why not feed the animals before taking food yourself?"

Bhagavan's kindness and solicitude also extended to the vegetation. Once the *sarvadhikari* of the Ashram asked a workman to clear the dead leaves of an almond tree. He started chopping right and left. Bhagavan called out the man. "Hey, you are torturing the tree too much. Don't you know it is alive? Imagine what would happen if I suddenly grabbed you by the hair and pulled. Your hair may have no life, yet you would feel it. Better leave the poor tree and go away."

Bhagavan's way was to influence rather than command. For example, he never ordered Devaraja Mudaliar [No.35] to become a vegetarian. As Mudaliar was not sure whether a vegetarian diet would contain adequate nourishment for him, Bhagavan assured him categorically

that he would not suffer if he gave up non-vegetarian food.

Ramakrishna Swami, who had been serving Bhagavan for many years, started visiting a woman in the town. Her relatives caught him in her house, bound him hand and foot and locked him in a room. He managed to escape and came running to the Ashram, pursued by his enemies. When he entered the Ashram gate, they gave up the chase. He entered the hall trembling and fell on the ground shouting 'save me, save me'. After Bhagavan had heard the man's confession, he looked at the culprit with understanding and pity and said, "You don't need to have this fear any longer. Go and sleep."

The Ashram people requested Bhagavan to send the man away, for his presence would tarnish the good name of the Ashram. Bhagavan called the man and told him in front of everybody, "You have done some wrong, but you were too foolish not to keep it secret. Others do worse things, but they take care not to be caught. Now, the people who were not caught want you to leave the Ashram because you were caught." The person was allowed to stay.

Bhagavan's standard prescription was to attend to one's own faults and problems before turning to alleged defects of others. Once a socially-minded person told Bhagavan, "What I would like to do is to go round and set things right. I came to you for the strength and power to do this work." Bhagavan said, "You are like a beggar offering to feast all comers. First set yourself right and then only set out to improve others. But one must begin somewhere, and one can begin only with oneself."

It is difficult to exaggerate the consideration of Bhagavan for the devotees. Dr. G. S. Melkote of Hyderabad was once treating Bhagavan for eczema but there was no improvement. The doctor had a sudden and urgent necessity to return home. He was filled with remorse at having to leave Bhagavan in that condition. I advised him to pray to Bhagavan to cure himself, which he did. From that night Bhagavan's eczema responded to treatment. The doctor literally wept at this miracle that enabled him to leave without any compunctions.

Cow Lakshmi[2] just could not spend a day without seeking Bhagavan's company some time or the other during the course of the day. One day she came to the hall, went straight to Bhagavan and literally wept on his shoulders. For half-an-hour Bhagavan kept consoling her, saying, "Why are you so sad, dear mother? Am I not here to look after you?" and so on, till she was pacified.

A lawyer R. Ramakrishniah from Nellore came with a long list of questions. He was quite proud of his questions and was sure that even Bhagavan would find them difficult to answer. But when he came to the hall and sat before Bhagavan his mind became paralysed and he could not ask a single question.

Prof. Syed [No.23] and his wife were great devotees of Bhagavan. They used to stay in a rented house outside the Ashram. One day Mrs. Syed felt a strong desire to invite Bhagavan to their house for food. She nagged her husband but he did not have the courage to ask for something so unusual. The bold lady went on pressing her husband until he got more afraid of her than of the enormity of her request. When he told Bhagavan about his wife's desire, he merely smiled and kept quiet. But the wife would not give up. One day, while Bhagavan was going up the hill, the couple stood before him and Prof. Syed told him her desire. Bhagavan just laughed and went up the hill.

When they returned home, there was quite a row in the house. The wife blamed the husband because she felt that he had not asked Bhagavan in the proper way. At last, when they had had enough of the quarrel, he told her, "How am I responsible? The truth of the matter is, your devotion is deficient." These words must have touched her deeply, for she sat in meditation throughout the night. She wanted by sheer intensity of her prayer to bring Bhagavan to dinner! During the early hours of the morning she must have dozed, for Bhagavan appeared to her in a dream or vision and told her, "Why are you so obstinate? How can I leave the Ashram and come to your house for food? I must dine along with the people there, otherwise they won't eat."

In her vision she saw three devotees, who, Bhagavan said, were to be fed, and it will be the same as feeding me. These were: Dr. G. S. Melkote, a Kanarese and a well-known personality of Hyderabad, Swami Prabhuddhananda, a Bengali *sannyasi,* and myself, an Andhra bachelor. She gave full details of her vision to Prof. Syed, who promptly invited all the three for food to his house. We were all Brahmins. Although we were delighted to represent Bhagavan at the feast, we were afraid of the reaction of the Ashram Brahmins.

Dr. Melkote was in the guesthouse near the flower garden. I went to him and asked, "What are you thinking about?" He said, "I am still thinking about it. They are Muslims. If we go, we are bound to get into a lot of trouble. They may turn us out of the Ashram." I told Dr. Melkote, "I am going because I take it as Bhagavan's direct order. Otherwise how

could Mrs. Syed pick us? How could she know our names and faces well enough to show to her husband?" Dr. Melkote replied, "Well, we are going, Bhagavan will attend to the risks."

In spite of these brave words, Dr. Melkote was perplexed. What do Muslims know about the Brahmin rules and habits of cleanliness? Why should we trust the vision of some Muslim lady? Could we really say that we were obeying Bhagavan's orders? Who would believe us?

The next day, when the bell for dinner was rung, we three went before Bhagavan and bowed. Bhagavan did not ask us the reason. He merely looked at us. Instead of going to the dining hall with the others, we marched out of the Ashram, passing before the *sarvadhikari* who, wonder of wonders, did not ask us why we were going out without eating the food.

After getting everything thoroughly cleaned, Mrs.Syed had lovingly prepared dish after dish. We found the food excellent. At the conclusion of the meal she offered us betel leaves with her own hands. As we were walking back to the Ashram, Dr. Melkote had tears in his eyes. He said, "I come from Hyderabad, and I know well the Muslim ways and customs. A Muslim lady will give betel leaves with her own hands to nobody except her husband or a *fakir*. In her eyes we were *fakirs*, the forms Bhagavan took to go to her place."

When we returned to the Ashram, we were astonished that no body had enquired why we had not been present in the dining hall, or where we had gone. How wonderfully does Bhagavan protect those who obey him!

Once I wrote a poem in praise of Bhagavan in which I said, "May you be with us in all your future births." Bhagavan heard this and said, "Is this birth not enough, that he wishes me many more?" People scolded me for writing so disrespectfully. Some said Bhagavan was beyond rebirth. Others maintained he was the son of great Siva Himself, who was never in need of a human body. I exclaimed, "Bhagavan will be reborn many times, not because he needs it but because we need him."

Bhagavan listened carefully. 'Right', he said, and became very quiet. The hall was filled with power and silence and immense love was pouring from Bhagavan like a mighty sea.

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1. A respectful form of address for elderly men.
2. *Refer* annexure-IV, The Cow Lakshmi, p.414.

63

Lakshman Sarma who came to Sri Ramana in the late 1920s, spent most of his life translating the Maharshi's teachings into Sanskrit. Sri Ramana closely supervised his Sanskrit translation of *Ulladu Narpadu*. Other than Muruganar, he was the only person to have received private lessons by Sri Ramana on the intent and meanings of his works. His Sanskrit treatise *Sri Ramana Paravidyopanishad* (1950), contains teachings of the Maharshi, a few of which are:

The man who has not experienced his own real Self, thinking 'I am this body' sees himself as 'I', the first person of grammar. He sees another person whom he calls 'you', and refers to a third person as 'he'. These three distinct persons are not real. They are seen on account of the false notion, 'I am the body'. When the ego-soul is lost as a result of quest of the real Self, only that Self, consciousness alone, will shine.

Just as one who has become wise to the truth of the mirage may again see the mirage without being deluded, so too the sage, seeing this world, does not think of it as real, as does the ignorant one.

When, forgetting the Self, one thinks that the body is oneself and goes through innumerable births and in the end remembers and becomes the Self, knows that this is only like awakening from a dream wherein one has wandered all over the world.

If during the quest of one's own Self, the mind turns outwards on account of its attachment to objects of perception, the seeker should turn it inwards again. He should bring the mind back again and again and re-engage it in the quest. There must be a resolve to become aware of the truth of oneself by means of the question, "Who is he that has this attachment to objects of perception?" The answer to this question is not an intellectual conclusion. The correct answer to it is only the experience of the real Self.

The quest of the source of the soul is named as 'The Great Yoga'. It is the yoga of action, the yoga of devotion, the yoga of restraining the mind and also the yoga of right awareness. By the practice of meditation mental strength will be intensified. Therefore, meditation is an aid to the quest. After first achieving stillness of the mind by meditation, the valiant aspirant must seek the truth of his own Self.

Just as a woman, suffering intolerably in her father-in-law's house, obtains peace in her mother's house, so the mind, harried by *samsaric* (worldly) sufferings, wins peace by returning to the source: the Real Self.

To create empty space in a room one only has to remove the encumbering, unwanted lumber. In the same way, to realise the Self nothing more is needed than the removal of false knowledge that I am the body.

For him that is established in the supreme state, desires do not arise, because the desirer, the ego, has ceased to exist. The sage in that state is ever contented. *In the end the writer says:*

To that supreme one, the Self of all creatures, who became our Guru, Sri Ramana – let there be thousands of *namaskarams* until the extinction of the ego is secured.

64

Natesa Iyer moved from Chidambaram to Tiruvannamalai and found employment as a cook at the Ashram. Though Iyer has not left any account of his stay and work with the Maharshi, David Godman has collected information from devotees who knew him well.

When Natesa Iyer felt an urge to renounce the world, he left his wife and daughter and came to Tiruvannamalai, where he came under Bhagavan's spell. When he started his job in the kitchen, most of the cooking was done by a group of Brahmin widows, who made him work very hard. Once he said laughingly that he ran away from one bossy woman and ended up working under five.

At one point when he got tired of the way he was being treated in the kitchen, he resolved to leave the Ashram without telling anyone. On the way back to his home he reached Villupuram, about 40 miles from Tiruvannamalai.There he put *vibhuti* on his forehead after the bath, closed the eyes and as he was saying a prayer to Bhagavan, he felt Bhagavan himself standing in front of him. "How did you get here?" asked Iyer in amazement. Bhagavan smiled and replied, "How far have you gone away from me." Iyer, dissolved in tears, was unable to reply.

The figure of Bhagavan began to walk towards Tiruvannamalai. Iyer had no hesitation in following him. The figure eventually disappeared, but Iyer felt that Bhagavan was always ahead of him and he reached the Ashram. When he entered the hall and prostrated, Bhagavan repeated the words, "How far have you gone away from me." Iyer broke down and cried. He went back to the kitchen and resumed his work.

This incident initiated a process of surrender in Iyer that culminated in the understanding that Bhagavan was not the body that everyone saw moving about the Ashram. He once said, "Bhagavan is not something or someone we can fathom with our minds. We have to admit our ignorance and our inability to say anything about him that is true. I cannot tell anything about Bhagavan because the real Bhagavan cannot be explained in words. It is a sweet taste that you can only know by tasting it yourself."

He loved to narrate his experience of the operation performed on Bhagavan, when he was his attendant. In his words: "**Bhagavan's behaviour throughout the operation showed very clearly that the body was just something that he was wearing.** The flesh was being cut, blood was flowing, and I could see the radium needles that had been inserted into the flesh around the cancerous growth. Bhagavan was fully conscious but utterly indifferent to the procedures that were being carried out on his arm. We were all consumed by the power of Bhagavan's silence. Even the doctors were sucked into it. When the operation had been completed, the doctors spontaneously prostrated to Bhagavan. One of them said, I have operated on many people, but I have never had an experience like this.There was peace in the room that I have never felt anywhere else. I cannot describe what it was like except to say that it was unlike anything I have ever experienced before."

V. Ganesan, a grandson of Bhagavan's brother, records:

A few years after Bhagavan passed away, as I approached the Ashram gate I was surprised to see Natesa Iyer seated on the steps of a temple close to the Ashram. On enquiry he said, "The Ashram management had asked me to leave. I have no other place to go. This is my *sadguru's* Ashram. I have decided to sit here because this is the closest I can get to the Ashram." Annoyed that he had been treated in this way, I went straight to my father, the Ashram president. But he refused to take him back.

I was very agitated and went to see Muruganar [No.53], who lived in a small cottage outside the Ashram. With tears in my eyes I told him what has happened. Muruganar gave me a mischievous smile and asked, "Why are you telling me about this? You could have gone directly to Bhagavan and told him about the problem. Will he not listen to you if you go to his *samadhi*?" I went to the shrine and shouted as loudly as I could: "Bhagavan! Injustice has been done to Natesa Iyer! My heart aches! Please allow him to come back to his job." Fortunately, no one was there to wintess my strange outbrust. I prostrated and left for *giri pradakshina,* confident that Bhagavan would take care of the problem.

The following morning, when I went to the Ashram I saw Iyer working at his usual place in the kitchen. When asked he told me, "When the president was walking home last night, he stopped in front of the temple and requested me to come back to the Ashram and take up the old job again."

***Regarding Iyer's passing away, Bhupati Narayana Raju wrote in September 1983 issue of* Arunachala Ramana:**

Natesa Iyer knew in advance that he was to pass away. "Raju", he said to me in high spirits, " Bhagavan is calling me. I am going in ten days." The next time I saw him, his spirits were still high: "Raju, only five more days, I am going in five days." His physical condition was deteriorating, but he was still full of energy. Some of the people there said, "Madness has got into his head." I knew something strange was going on. He became very weak and was unable to take even liquid food. On the tenth day he lost consciousness, but his face suddenly became very bright. In a spirited tone he enquired, "Has Bhagavan come? I am coming." These were the last words that came from his lips.

65

Sampurnamma (1899-1993), a Brahmin widow, served for long as a cook at the Ashram.

When my husband died, I fell into a state of deep despair in which I thought that life was no longer worth living. One day during this period, when I came out after worshipping at the Meenakshi Temple, Madurai, an old Brahmin asked, "Won't you cook a meal for me?" It was a strange request. A Brahmin would ask for already-prepared food, but this man wanted food to be made for him. However, I invited him to accompany me to our family house promising him to cook a meal for him. Before going back with the Brahmin, I had to go inside the temple for a short while. When I came out, the Brahmin was not to be seen. I had good reasons to believe that the old man was Bhagavan himself and the request was a summons to cook for him.

As Bhagavan was born in a village next to our village, many of our people knew him. When he became a great saint my relatives often used to go to see him. In 1928, I accompanied my sister and her husband

to Tiruvannamalai. I was able to sit for long hours in Bhagavan's presence, immersed in a strange state in which the mind would not have a single thought. Those were days of deep and calm happiness in which my devotion to Bhagavan took firm roots. On this first visit, I stayed for twenty days. While leaving, I got a copy of *Who am I* ? from Bhagavan's own hands.

Back in my village, I was restless. I longed to go to the Ashram; and gladly accompanied my uncle who happened to go there. On my arrival I was to help in the kitchen. I was not good at cooking, but Bhagavan was always by my side, helping me with detailed instructions. His firm principle was that health depended on food that could be digested easily. So, we used to spend hours on grinding and stewing. Bhagavan was always willing to leave the hall to give advice in the kitchen.

Once someone sent a huge load of brinjals and we ate brinjals day after day. The stalks alone made a big heap, which was lying in a corner. Bhagavan asked us to cook them as a curry! I was stunned, for even cattle would refuse to eat such useless stalks. Bhagavan insisted that the stalks were edible, and we put them in a pot to boil along with dry peas. After hours of boiling they were as hard as ever. We were at a loss what to do; yet we did not dare to disturb Bhagavan.

Bhagavan always knew when he was needed in the kitchen and he would leave the hall even in the middle of a discussion. A casual visitor would think that Bhagavan's mind was on cooking. In reality his grace was on the cooks. As usual, he did not fail us and appeared in the kitchen. "How is the curry getting on?" he asked. " Is it a curry we are cooking? We are boiling steel nails! I exclaimed laughing. He stirred the preparation with a ladle and went away without saying anything. Soon afterwards we found the stalks quite tender. The dish was simply delicious, and many diners were asking for a second helping.

As a cook, Bhagavan was perfect. He was very strict with us. We soon learned that his orders were to be obeyed to the last detail. So long as we followed his instructions, everything would go well with our cooking, but the moment we tried to act on our own we were in trouble.

One would think from the care he took in cooking that he liked good food and enjoyed a hearty meal. Not at all. When meals were served, he would mix up the little food he would allow to be put on his leaf-plate – the sweet, the sour and the savoury, everything together – and gulp it down carelessly as if he had no taste in the mouth. When we would tell him that it was not right to mix such nicely prepared dishes, he would say, "Enough of multiplicity, let us have some unity."

Bhagavan would allow nothing to go waste. Even a grain of rice or a mustard seed lying on the ground would be picked up, dusted and taken to the kitchen and put in its proper place. I asked him why he gave himself so much trouble for a grain of rice. He said, "Yes, this is my way. Everything is in my care and I let nothing go waste. In these matters I am quite strict."

While we were cooking he would tell us stories. He used cooking to teach us religion and philosophy. He also taught us that work is love for others. He imbued us with the spirit that we are to serve others. By his very presence he taught us that we are always in the presence of God and that all work is His.

As ladies were not allowed to stay in the Ashram at night, we had our accommodation in the town. In coming to and going from the Ashram I had to walk in along a jungle path. When Bhagavan noticed that it made me afraid, he said, "Why are you afraid? Am I not with you?" Once when I came before dawn, the *sarvadhikari* asked me, "How could you come all alone? Were you not afraid?" Bhagavan rebuked him: "Why are you surprised? Was she alone? Was I not with her all the time?"

Once another lady cook and myself decided to walk around the hill. We started very early. We were very afraid of the jungle. After walking a little way we saw a strange, blue light in front of us. It was something mysterious and we thought it was a ghost, but it led us along the path. When we realised it was guiding us, we felt safe with it. It left us at dawn.

Another time, the two of us were walking around the hill early in the morning and chattering about our homes and relatives. We noticed a man following us at a distance. We had to pass through a stretch of lonely forest, so we stopped to let him pass us and go ahead. He too stopped. When we walked he also walked.

We got alarmed and prayed aloud, "Lord Arunachala, you alone can save us." The man caught up with us and remarked, "Yes, Arunachala is our only refuge. Keep your mind constantly on him. Always have him in mind." We wondered who he might be. Was he sent by Bhagavan to remind us that it is not proper to talk of worldly matters, while going round the hill, or was it Arunachala himself in human disguise? We looked back. But there was nobody on the path.

During their period days, women were not given Ashram food to eat, nor allowed to enter the Ashram. Once, when Bhagavan was told that I would not be coming for three days and was sitting in the *mandapam* in

front of the Ashram gate, he ordered that I be brought inside and served the Ashram food. Everybody was shocked, for it was a clear breach of the accepted rule. An ancient rule was thus broken and Bhagavan had sanctified its breach.

I once suggested that we should eat our dinner in the open air. Bhagavan agreed and we arranged the food to be served in the courtyard near the hall. As Bhagavan sat with us, we saw a strong and clear halo around his head. Was it the moonlight or some other cause? I cannot say, but the halo was there and many could see it. Just before the meal, somebody brought a big basketful of sweets, enough for all. Was it a coincidence or Bhagavan's wonderful play?

66

Shantammal, head cook at the Ashram, belonged to Ramanathapuram in Tamil Nadu.

In 1927, I, along with three other women, went to see Bhagavan. He was sitting on a bench in a thatched shed with Muruganar [No. 53] at his side. As soon as I saw him I knew he was God in human form. I bowed reverently and said, "Grant that my mind does not trouble me any more." He turned to Muruganar and said, "Ask her to find out whether there is such a thing as mind. If there is, ask her to describe it." I was very confused since his *upadesa* meant little to me at the time, but I remembered to honour Bhagavan by singing a verse from *Ramana Stuti Panchakam*: "Your spiritual splendour fills the universe with its perfume. Attracted by it, numberless beings turn their face to you. I too grew restless and sought you eagerly. Where is he? I enquired, and now I have come to you." When Bhagavan asked me how I knew this verse, Muruganar said that he had given me a copy of the book. On this first visit we stayed for forty days.

After spending a year at my place in Ramanathapuram, I visited the Ashram on a *jayanti* day. When I arrived, Bhagavan was explaining something from *Ulladu Narapadu* to Dandapani Swami.[1] When Bhagavan saw me, his first question was, "Have you received a copy of this book? I asked them to post one to you." I said to myself, my Lord remembers me by name and how loving is his personal attention to my needs!

At that time, Bhagavan was unusually active, working both in the kitchen and outside. He would clean grain, shell nuts, grind seeds, stitch leaf-plates we ate from, and so on. We would join him in every task and listen to his stories, jokes, reminiscences and spiritual teachings.

Once we had to fry a big quantity of snake gourd. This vegetable is full of water and the usual way is to squeeze the water out of it to shorten the frying time, but Bhagavan said it should be fried with water in it. We were sitting near the fire, stirring the vegetable in a big iron pan with long ladles. Suddenly Bhagavan let go his ladle and stared, motionless. When I looked at him my mind stood still. Everything disappeared from before my eyes.

After some time Bhagavan said, "The curry is noiseless, it is time to add the spices." It could refer to cooking the vegetables; it could also refer to his poem *Aksharamanamalai*, in which he addresses Arunachala: You drugged me with your charm and I woke up full of knowledge. When the curry of mind is silent, then it is time to add spices of wisdom.

When I first worked in the kitchen, there were no proper jars for foodstuff, which made the kitchen floor messy. I mentioned the problem to Bhagavan. Ten days later I was called to the hall. Attendants were opening wooden boxes that contained six beautiful jars. Bhagavan told me, "You wanted jars. Take them to the kitchen." On enquiry I found that some person had booked them to the Ashram. Such mysterious incidents used to happen every now and then.

I can give another example. Once I had no money and badly needed some. I prayed silently to Bhagavan: "Ramana, how can I get hold of a little money?" Three days later I received a money order from one Dr. Srinivasa Rao, whom I did not even know. It seems he was reading an account of Bhagavan's life, and on reading the name of Shantammal decided that it would be nice to send her some money.

The following year, I wanted to return briefly to Ramanathapuram for the *devi puja.*[2] Later, while I was sitting in the hall in meditation, I saw, instead of Bhagavan, a little girl. She was full of charm and splendour, intensely alert and powerful and she radiated a golden brilliance. The vision soon ended and I saw the normal face of Bhagavan again. I understood at once that Bhagavan was the goddess I had wanted to worship in Ramanathapuram. Where, now, was the need for a pilgrimage to a goddess when I was daily serving one in whom all gods are born?

When I was still new in the kitchen, I served Bhagavan with a few extra pieces of potato. Bhagavan got very angry. Each night, after

the day's work was over, the women who worked in the kitchen would collect around the Maharshi and ask permission to leave.[3] Usually, he would exchange a few words with us, enquire who was accompanying us, whether we had a lantern, and so on. That evening he gave me a sign to come near and said, "You served me extra curry. I felt ashamed to eat more than the others. You should always serve me less than other people. The more you love my people, the more you love me." The matter was closed. A good lesson was learnt and never forgotten.

Once the Maharaja of Mysore visited the Ashram. Trays and trays of sweets and other presents were laid at Bhagavan's feet. For ten minutes the Maharaja just stood looking and then prostrated before Bhagavan. Tears flowing from his eyes made Bhagavan's feet wet. He told Bhagavan, "They made me Maharaja and bound me to a throne. For the sin of being born a king, I lost the chance of sitting at your feet and serving in your glorious presence. I do not hope to come again. Only these few minutes are mine. I pray for your grace."

A devotee while taking leave of Bhagavan said, "Swami, I am going far away from you. The devotees who are staying in the Ashram are enjoying the bliss of your company every minute. Please accept me also in the same manner." Bhagavan replied, "Everyone thinks that special grace is bestowed on the devotees who stay here. If there is such a preference how can he be a *jnani*? The Lord is bound to protect a person who has surrendered to Him. In fact one who has surrendered need not even pray; the Lord always remains close extending His protection. The frog stays near the lotus but it is only the bees that suck the honey of the flowers, from whatever distance they may come from."

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1. Father-in-law of great poet Muruganar (no. 53).
2. Worship of a female deity.
3. Women were not allowed to stay in the Ashram at night.

67

Sundaram (Sadhu Trivenigiri) was a spiritually-minded person. He came to the Ashram in 1933 and was taken on the staff. He worked for long years in the kitchen.

In 1932, as I stood before the deity of the Subramaniyam temple, the following words flashed into my consciousness: "Here I am God who does not talk. Go to Tiruvannamalai. The Maharshi is a god who talks." This was how the Maharshi's grace manifested itself to me. I had not even seen him at that time.

In 1933, after my wife's death, I gave up my job and came to Sri Ramanasramam. As the *sarvadhikari* knew my family very well, he immediately engaged me for the Ashram work.

Prior to my arrival, I had been suffering from asthma for many years. It gave me a lot of trouble, but I did not mention it to Bhagavan. Once Bhagavan gave me a pinch of chutney he had prepared and said, "This is medicine for you." I swallowed the same. Later I realised that I was completely cured of my asthma.

At night, after visitors had left, we would all collect around Bhagavan. We felt like a big family assembled after a day's work. During those short hours Bhagavan would enquire about our welfare, chat with us, make us laugh and also give us instructions for the next day.

Bhagavan always felt concerned about the welfare of his devotees. One day, for example, when Major Chadwick [No.42] was down with fever, Bhagavan asked, "How is he now?" When I replied that I did not know and had not seen him, he directed me to go and see him. He added, "He left his country and travelled thousands of miles, staying with us and making us his own. Should we not take care of him and look after his needs?"

Once, when I served food to Bhagavan, he asked, "Why did you serve me more than usual? How you dare make distinctions like this?" The people nearby pleaded for me. "No Bhagavan," they said, "Sundaram did not serve you more. Look, we got as much as you did." But Bhagavan would not be so easily appeased. "You do not know, the ego is strong in him. His giving preference to me is the working of his ego", he said.

One morning when I was cutting vegetables along with Bhagavan, he said, "Sundaram! Take this hurricane light and pick up the mangoes that have fallen from the tree." I said, "Yes", but continued cutting the vegetables. Bhagavan said, "Sundaram, attend to what 'I' said first. It is from me that everything arises. Attend to it first." I took this as an *adesha* and *upadesa* (order and instruction) to make the enquiry 'Who am I?' My friends also felt so.

One day the attendant Madhavan was binding a book. A devotee wanted a book from the library. Bhagavan asked Madhavan to get it saying, "You do my work; I will do your work." And Bhagavan took the book and went on with the binding while Madhavan got the library book.

Once while meditating in the presence of Bhagavan, my mind persisted in wandering. I couldn't control it. So I gave up meditation and opened my eyes. Bhagavan at once sat up on his couch and said, "Oh! You abandon it thinking it is the *swabhava* (nature) of the mind to wander. Whatever we practice becomes the *swabhava*. If control is practised *persistently* that will become the *swabhava*." Yet another *upadesa* for me.

The injunction against the leftover food from the previous day is very much respected in the higher castes of South India. But Bhagavan insisted that avoidance of waste overruled everything else, and he would never permit God's gift to be thrown away. As for giving the leftovers to beggars, it was not possible because Bhagavan insisted that beggars be given the same food as everyone else, and not some inferior stuff. Even dogs had to be fed from the common meal. Bhagavan would come to the kitchen in the early hours, see the leftovers from the night before, warm them up, dilute them, and add some more ingredients to make them palatable.

Bhagavan was neither a rebel nor a reformer. He did not discourage people from following their religious customs at home, but in the Ashram he would not take any custom for granted. At Sri Ramanasramam he was both the religion and the custom.

68

Subbalakshmi Ammal, a Brahmin widow, got Sri Ramana's blessings when she was sixteen, but she came to his fold 15 years later and served as a cook at the Ashram for long.

After losing my husband at the age of 16, I went back to my mother's house, devoting my life in prayer and meditation. While returning from a pilgrimage from Rameswaram with my mother, we stopped at Tiruvannamalai. When we went up the hill, Sri Ramana was sitting outside the Virupaksha Cave. He was about thirty at the time and wonderful to behold. His eyes were blooming and clear like petals of a lotus and he shone brightly like burnished gold. I, somehow, at once got a feeling that god Arunachala himself had come in a human form. We returned to our

village in Nellore. I did not even dream at that time that my life would be spent at the feet of the great Swami.

Fifteen years later, again on our return from a pilgrimage, we stopped at Tiruvannamalai and enquired about the Swami. He was sitting on a couch in the hall. We sat in silence for about ten minutes before him. This gave me an unforgettable experience of mental stillness. Away from him, I spent most of the next year vainly trying to free myself from thoughts.

When I chanced to go to the Ashram again, I went to the hall. No one else being there, I gathered courage and asked, "What is *atma*?" Bhagavan replied, "To remain without thinking is *atma.*" Then he looked at me and I felt my mind melt away into nothing. No thoughts came. Only the feeling of immense unutterable peace was there.

One day Bhagavan's own sister asked me to take her place in the Ashram kitchen because she had to leave for some time. I could not refuse. At that time Shantammal [No.66] was the chief cook and my duty was to help her. To my great joy I discovered that Bhagavan worked with us in the kitchen for most of the time. He soon taught me how to cook tastily and neatly.

Once Bhagavan was grinding the *dhal*. It was heart-rending to see him do so. Yet I did not have the courage to take his place lest he may stop coming to the kitchen, which was far more important to us than anything else. Later, when he asked me to take over I was happy thinking that the Swami had got some relief. But when I went into the kitchen, I saw him standing near the fire preparing some dish. He was sweating profusely. A boiling vegetable piece fell on his hand causing it to swell. When asked about it he joked, "Don't you know? It is my special ring."

Sometime later, I felt overburdened with work. I wanted to sit quietly and meditate in solitude. I went back to my village, but my heart was really at Sri Ramanasramam. At home, it seemed to me that I was wasting my time.

On a festival day at the Ashram, Bhagavan announced, "Today Subbalakshmi will turn up. Keep some *pongal* for her." Bhagavan's prediction was correct; that was the day I returned to the Ashram, unannounced, after a year. In the weeks and months that followed I wanted to leave the Ashram many times, but Bhagavan held on to me far more powerfully than I held on to him.

I used to keep fast quite often. I had read: "He who wants to know himself and yet pays attention to his body is like a man who trusts a crocodile to take him across a river." When I showed the text to Bhagavan,

he said, "It does not mean that you should starve. It only means that you should not give the body more than it needs. With your mind, hold on to the enquiry [Who am I?] and just keep the body going on so that it does not become a hindrance. For this, fresh food, simply prepared and taken in moderation is a great help."

Bhagavan disliked being given preference in any form. For example, he would refuse to eat *pappadams,* if out of our love we selected a bigger one for him. Torn between attachment and obedience, we felt lost. When our Lord wanted to be treated as equal with the humblest, we felt ourselves to be the smallest of the small.

During the meal I would pour *rasam* into Bhagavan's hands. He would sip it, and when his palms were empty I would fill them again. One day he asked me to pour *rasam* over the rice and go. I thought I had offended him in some way and asked Shantammal [No. 66] to find out the reason. Bhagavan told her, "When she serves me slowly, she makes others wait." Despite my protests and requests, he never took *rasam* again in his palms.

He would ruthlessly sacrifice the little comforts we so loved to provide for him, as soon as he noticed a trace of preference. The law that what cannot be shared must not be touched was supreme in his way of dealing with us. Separate and exclusive feelings are the cause of 'I' and therefore the greatest obstacles in the realisation of the Self. No wonder he was exterminating them so relentlessly.

Bhagavan loved retelling incidents from old devotional classics. His face would light up as he recounted the amazing stories of saints of long ago. He would be visibly moved when he recited their inspired poetry.

With children, Bhagavan was their playmate; to family people he was a wise counsellor; to pandits he was a storehouse of knowledge; and to yogis, he was God of victory. **Everyone who came to him with a sense of devotion was charmed by his love and kindness, his beauty and wisdom,** and by the overwhelming sense of unity he radiated. Crowds would gather around him and each one would see him differently.

One afternoon a lady visitor sat near Bhagavan and exclaimed, "How glad I am that I have met you, Swami! I have been desperate to see you for such a long time, Swami. Please be kind enough to give me salvation. That is all I want. I want nothing else." After she left, Bhagavan had a hearty laugh and said, "Look at her! Is salvation something to be handed over on request? Do I keep bundles of salvation concealed about me that I can give away when people ask fot it? She said, 'I do not want anything else.' If what she says is true, that itself is salvation."

Though Bhagavan did not mind our faults and mistakes, he made us follow his instructions to the letter. While he was in the kitchen, he was one of us; but in the hall, seated on the sofa, he was the great Lord of Kailas. While in the hall he belonged to everybody, but when he came to the kitchen, he belonged only to us.

Bhagavan would take any amount of trouble to teach us the virtues necessary for self-discovery. Our life at the Ashram was a school of yoga, and a hard school too.Through the trifles of daily life he taught us Vedanta both in theory and practice. We were changed to the root of our being, not knowing the depth and scope of his influence.

Bhagavan would make the small tasks of daily life into avenues that led to light and bliss. We experienced ecstasy in grinding, rapture in cooking, and joy in serving *iddlies* to the devotees. Why? Because while we were doing these things, we were experiencing the state in which the mind is in the Heart. One who has not experienced this cannot really know how much bliss a human heart can contain.

Lord Krishna in his mercy became a cowherd to teach simple milkmaids the way to salvation. Similarly, Bhagavan, the same Supreme Being in another form, took to cooking in order to save a few ignorant women.

69

Wolter A. Keers was a Dutch teacher and writer who lectured extensively on Yoga and Advaita in Europe in the 1970s and 80s. Shortly before his death in the 1980s, he invited his friends to a party at his house in his hometown. At the end of the party, he informed his friends that he was going to give up his body. He prostrated to a large photo of Sri Ramana that he had placed on the floor. Then he placed a cushion in front of the photo, laid down his head on the cushion at Sri Ramana's feet and passed away.

I brought a large amount of spiritual *samskaras* into this life. I was born into a family of clergymen. All interest in our household was focused on matters of religion. I must have been taught how to pray almost before I could talk.

During a despairing phase of my life, I read *Jnana Yoga* by Swami Vivekananda. It caused something of an explosion in me. There, in those pages, I finally found someone who had been able to put into words what I had been feeling intuitively. It was a relief to discover that countless seekers down the ages had shared my own problem and spiritual hunger.

Not long after, I came across *The Secret Path* by Paul Brunton [No.1]. When I read in those pages that there was a living sage in India with whom one could talk, blue patches returned to my sky. There was a photo of Bhagavan in the book. I used to focus on it during my meditation and I also began to concentrate on the heart-centre that Bhagavan had stated was on the right chest. It took a lot of effort and practice to become fully absorbed in these objects of meditation, but I persevered because I felt at the time that these were tools that had been given to me by Bhagavan.

I concentrated on Bhagavan more and more. Sometimes, I was almost fighting with him, begging him to help me in my efforts to come and see him. I know it sounds absurd to make such a claim, but there came a point when I could confidently say 'I won'. One day I looked at Bhagavan's photo and knew with a calm unshakable certainty that I would be travelling to India. And the opportunity came in the beginning of 1950.

Roda Maclver [No.126], a Bombay devotee who had been living near Bhagavan for several years took me to the Ashram and pointed out Bhagavan to me. **The mere sight of him made me tremble all over because I had come face to face with the divine.** This recognition affected me so much that my body shook involuntarily. As I gazed at Bhagavan, I felt I saw God himself sitting there.

In that early morning meeting I saw a blazing light that had taken a human form. It was more radiant than anything I had ever seen before. When I was very young, I had believed that God was some magnificent being, having a human form that radiated light and goodness. I had long since abandoned this childhood belief, believing it to be a fairy story that was told only to credulous children. Yet now this childhood belief turned out to be true, because here before me was a human form that seemed to be made of light itself. God became manifest before my eyes, announcing his presence to me by radiating a blazing, penetrating light, a light that went right through me like x-rays.

When I had time to reflect on this first *darshan*, it seemed amazing that such an air of normality could prevail around someone who was radiating so much light and energy. Perhaps other people were not seeing and feeling what I was experiencing. I asked Roda about this

later that day. She laughed and said, "Many people do have special experiences when they see Bhagavan. For most of the time we all see him as a normal, elderly person sitting on a sofa, but once in a while he graces us with an experience, such as you had today, that convinces us of his greatness and his divinity."

There was a radiant power and energy in Bhagavan's presence that effortlessly swept through the mind and matter. His grace silenced my mind, it filled my heart, and it took me to realms that were way beyond the phenomenal. The light radiating from Bhagavan filled my being, sweeping away all my darkness in one stroke. Effort seemed redundant when his presence alone was enough to evaporate the usual mental flow of thoughts, ideas and problems.

For me, Bhagavan's immediate presence was overwhelmingly potent and nothing could distract or disturb me there. However, I began to notice that the exalted state of experience in his presence gradually wore off when I went back to my little house opposite the Ashram. Sitting in Bhagavan's presence I felt a quiet lucidity. All thoughts and problems would be swept away, burnt in the raging fire of his potent presence. But after a few hours of being alone in my room, I would realise that these states were only temporary because my old thoughts and problems would eventually rise up again. I felt I had to confront Bhagavan with this problem. I had not come to him for blissful experiences; I had come to him to seek a permanent end to my mind and all its problems.

That day when I passed in front of him, a quick smile passed over his face. I somehow felt that he knew what I had come for. Was he smiling at the audacity of my demand? I sat down among the crowd close to Bhagavan, and began to bombard him with thoughts. With all the mental energy I could summon up, I shot out my complaint at him: 'Bhagavan, of what use is all your radiance to me if I cannot solve my mental problems the moment I leave you?' This, with minor variations, I repeated again and again. Bhagavan took no notice. He continued to go through his everyday routine. Frustrated, I concentrated on him even more. I tried to shake his indifference with my thoughts. I felt I was shaking him the way I would shake a tree to get a fruit to fall off. The whole force of my will was focused on one thought, 'I must have an answer; I must have an answer.' Finally, my mental persistence paid off. He turned in my direction and looked at me with a smile of utter amazement on his face. Then his expression changed and its new configuration exclaimed, 'You are looking

for your glasses and they are on your nose!' No words passed his lips, but the message came to me with unbelievable clarity. There was no doubt or conjecture or imagination. Bhagavan continued to gaze at me. Perhaps he was waiting for some kind of response.

Suddenly his eyes emitted light and spat fire at me. I can think of no other way of describing that sudden explosion in his gaze. His powerful look went straight into me, boring away at everything that made me think I was different and separate from him. I felt the right-hand-side heart getting warmer as he continued to gaze at me, until I felt it to be a hot, fiery ball glowing inside me. I felt as if he was charging it with some immensely powerful spiritual electricity because, as he continued to look at me, I had the unmistakable feeling that my heart-centre was some kind of spiritual dynamo that was emitting sparks of light and energy. I felt as if some enormously potent electrical apparatus had been suddenly transplanted into my chest.

I sat rigid and straight, my eyes glued to his. Fire flowed from his glowing eyes and drilled into the core of my being. How long this transmission lasted, I cannot say. Time and space had no meaning in that never-ending moment when our eyes were locked together. At some point, I realised that my body could no longer stand the strain. The fire in my chest had expanded to the point where I felt that I was about to explode. Mentally, I asked Bhagavan to let me go.

I had received what I had come for. There was a complete transformation, inside and out, and it all happened without a word being spoken. That communication through silence was clearer and more direct than any explanation that could be given in words.

Having received the blessings and initiation, I gave my place in the crowd to those who might still have been seeking their own final benediction. Back in Bombay, where I stayed in a friend's flat, I was amazed to discover to what extent changes had occurred. Something had clearly and demonstrably transformed my mind and my understanding.

My two months' stay with Bhagavan had turned me inside out and upside down. My mind and heart had been illuminated by his grace, but I also knew that the time I spent with him had been too short to remove all obstacles. Being with Bhagavan had given me the unshakable conviction that he was looking after me. I knew that he was supervising my spiritual welfare. I also knew that his guidance would not cease simply because he had shed his body. Three months after his physical departure I had a vision of Bhagavan that amply justified my faith that he would continue to guide me.

I used to imagine myself in the hall, speaking with him. During one of these imaginary exercises, I suddenly found myself transported back to Sri Ramanasramam, and once more I was sitting opposite to him. **He smiled at me. How can that smile ever be described? It contained the whole world. On this occasion I felt I was being bathed in a radiant glow of love and light.** I asked him what I should do about all the various mental problems. He told me to spend time with another venerable teacher whose name was mentally mentioned to me. I spent several years with this man until I felt that all my problems had been overcome.

I still find myself being with Bhagavan. Sometimes it is with form and sometimes it is without form. It is a kind of deep visitation that touches and overwhelms me when it suddenly descends.When Bhagavan's presence makes itself known to me, I feel tears beginning to flow. Deep emotions arise. I glow with happiness and my heart leaps into the sky.

The first time I saw Bhagavan, I immediately recognised that this was the being I had been looking for all my life. My immediate experiences in his presence cemented that conviction. The problem I always encounter when I start to speak or write about Bhagavan is that the real **Ramana the Maharshi is unimaginable and therefore indescribable. Who, for example, can really describe happiness? My experience of Bhagavan was pure happiness.The pure radiance of his real, egoless state is unimaginable, beyond any verbal description.**

I was inclined to compare him with Jesus or the Buddha. But they were images in my head, formed on the beliefs in which I had been brought up and on the stories heard and read later on. Sri Ramana Maharshi, from the second I saw him, was anything but an image in my head. **He was a bomb that exploded the myth of my life. His look blasted away years of accumulated wrong ideas.**

In his presence reality manifested itself. His presence revealed to me how stupid I had been all my life. **I came to Bhagavan for help to climb a mountain, but after smiling at my idea of help, he showed me that the mountain did not exist.** I regarded myself as a poor man in need of help. He revealed to me that I was more than a millonaire. He showed me that I was the source of all things. **He enabled me to realise the timeless, unimaginable, unthinkable 'I am'.**

Simply by abiding in his luminous natural state, he made me experience myself as a light. I will not say that in his presence my sense of

'I' vanished completely; it simply diminished in significance. It took me three or four years for the full impact of Bhagavan's silence to settle in me and become, if I may use such a phrase, 'my own'.

Bhagavan encouraged us to examine through self-enquiry, questions such as,'Who wants to realise? Who feels exalted or miserable? Who feels angry, desired or shunned?' The purpose here is not to track down the person who had these feelings or emotions, it is to discover that such a person does not and never did exist.

By sitting in Bhagavan's presence, there was a confrontation between illusion and truth, and in that confrontation illusion could not sustain itself. **Whatever transformation took place in his presence happened of its own accord, not because he desired it or willed it. Darkness was exposed to light and ceased to be dark. Light did not orchestrate it in any way. It simply expressed its inherent nature. If you ask me how all this worked, my answer is, 'I don't know.'**

70

Annamalai Swami (1906-1995) since his childhood had a natural inclination towards spirituality. He came to Sri Ramana in 1928 and got a job with the Ashram. After being closely involved in many construction projects for ten years under direct supervision of Sri Ramana, he shifted to Palakottu near the Ashram to live alone and meditate.

In 1928, a wandering *sadhu* gave me a copy of *Upadesa Undiyar* by Sri Ramana. It contained a photo of the Maharshi. As soon as I saw the photo I had the feeling that this was my Guru. Simultaneously, an intense desire arose within me to go and see him. That night I had a dream in which I saw the Maharshi walking from the lower slopes of the hill towards the Ashram. Next morning I decided to go and have his *darshan*.

Having arrived at about 1 p.m., when I approached the hall, a part of the dream I had repeated itself in real life. I saw Bhagavan walk down the hill as I had seen in the dream. When I sat down and Bhagavan gazed at me in silence for about 10-15 minutes, I had a great feeling of physical relief and relaxation. It was like immersing myself in a cool pool after being in the hot sun. I asked for permission to stay, which was granted and

I got a job as Bhagavan's attendant. At that time Madhava Swami was doing the job by himself.

About ten days after my arrival I asked Bhagavan how I could attain Self-realisation? He replied, "If you give up identifying with the body and meditate on the Self, you can attain Self-realisation." As I was pondering over these remarks, Bhagavan surprised me by saying, "I was waiting for you. I was wondering when you would come." As a new comer I was too afraid to ask him how he knew, or how long he had been waiting. But I was delighted to hear him speak like this because it seemed to indicate that it was my destiny to stay with him.

A few days later I asked, "Scientists have invented and produced the aircraft which can travel at great speeds in the sky. Why do you not give us a spiritual aircraft in which we can quickly and easily cross over the sea of *samsara?*" Bhagavan replied, "The path of self-enquiry is the aircraft you need. It is direct, fast, and easy to use. You are already travelling very quickly towards realisation. It is only because of your mind that it seems that there is no movement." In the years that followed, I had many spiritual talks with Bhagavan but his basic message never changed. It was always: "Do self-enquiry, stop identifying with the body and try to be aware of the Self, which is your real nature."

When I first came to the Ashram there were still some leopards in the area. They rarely came into the Ashram but at night they frequented the place where Bhagavan used to urinate. Once when a leopard appeared he was not in the least afraid. He just looked at the leopard and said, '*Poda!*' [Go away!] and the leopard walked away.

Soon after I came I was given a new name by Bhagavan. My original name was Sellaperumal. One day Bhagavan mentioned that I reminded him of Annamalai Swami, who had been his attendant at the Skandasram. And within a few days my new identity got established.

When I had been an attendant for about two weeks, the Collector of Vellore, who came for Bhagavan's *darshan*, brought a large plate of sweets, which I was to distribute to everyone in the Ashram. While I was distributing the sweets outside the hall I went to a place where no one could see me and secretly helped myself to about double the quantity that I was serving to others. When I went back to the hall and kept the empty plate under Bhagavan's sofa, he looked at me and said, "Did you take twice as much as everyone else?" I was shocked because I was sure that no one had seen me do it. This incident made me realise that it was impossible to hide anything from Bhagavan.

After serving as an attendant for a month, Bhagavan asked me to supervise construction work within the Ashram. My big assignment was supervising the construction of the cowshed on a scale much bigger than envisaged by the *sarvadhikari,* as Bhagavan wanted it that way. The problem was of funds, which came almost under miraculous circumstances.

The editor of *The Sunday Times*, Madras, published a long complimentary article about Bhagavan after he had his *darshan*. This article came to the attention of a prince in North India, who was much impressed by Bhagavan. Sometime later, the prince went for a tiger hunt. He managed to track down the tiger but when he raised his rifle to shoot, he felt paralysed by a wave of fear. Suddenly he remembered about Bhagavan and prayed saying, "If successful, I will not only send you Rs.1000, but also donate the head and skin of the tiger." The paralysis left him and he killed the tiger and saved his own life in the process, as the tiger was within attacking distance.

Two days after all the quarrels about the size of the cowshed, the postman appeared with Rs.1,000. I took the money to Bhagavan who remarked in a most casual way, "Yes, I have been expecting the money order. Take it to the *sarvadhikari*."

Our finances were always in a precarious position but we never experienced any real financial crisis. While the work was going on, enough donations would come to cover all costs. If no building works were in progress, no donations would come.[1]

Bhagavan took a keen interest in the construction work, guiding me at all stages of the work. In the evening, when I went to him with my daily report, he would tell me the work to be done the following day. For any difficult jobs he would even explain how to go about.

I had hired both men and women for the construction of the dining hall. Some of the women were quite attractive and I was occasionally troubled by sexual desires. I told Bhagavan, "I don't want *moksha*, I just want that the desire for women should not enter my mind." Bhagavan laughed and said, "All the *mahatmas* are striving only for this." To avoid sexual thoughts, I decided to do away with women workers. Bhagavan did not approve of this. He saw no reason why the women should lose their jobs merely because I was unable to control my mind.

Bhagavan spent hours in our company on the construction work. He often used to say, "When I am outside I am more healthy – that six-feet long sofa is just like a jail for me." He would go back to the hall when informed that some devotees had come to the hall for his *darshan*. Once,

Bhagavan saw his attendant coming to tell him that some people had come, he turned to me and said, "A new warrant is coming for my arrest. I have to go back to jail."

In the 1930s Bhagavan alone decided when and where the buildings should be built, on what scale and what material be used. He drew up the plans for Ashram buildings, and told me what to do. If instructions were complicated he would sometimes sketch a few lines on a piece of paper to clarify or illustrate what he was saying. When he gave me plans he would always say that it was only a suggestion. He never presumed to give me orders.

Bhagavan himself wrote in Tamil *pakasalai* [2] in big letters on a piece of paper. These along with the year 1938 and Sri Ramanasramam in *devanagari* script, appear today on the top of the eastern wall of the dining hall.

Bhagavan would frequently come out to see what we were doing. He bombarded us with advice and instructions and would occasionally join in the work himself. But he would say, "I am not connected with any of the activities here. I just witness all that happens."

Bhagavan would start projects when no money was available to pay, happily ignoring all predictions of imminent financial doom made by the *sarvadhikari*. He never asked anyone for money and he forbade the *sarvadhikari* from begging for donations[3] yet somehow enough donations came to complete every building.

Once when Bhagavan was very sick, Maurice Frydman [No.36] gave Rs.1,000 to the *sarvadhikari* for buying fruits for Bhagavan. Knowing that Bhagavan would not eat fruits unless everyone else was given an equal share, he avoided the use of money for the purpose. Some months later, Frydman complained to Bhagavan that his donation had not been properly spent. Bhagavan said rather angrily, "When you give something you should regard the matter as closed. How dare you use this gift to further your ego?"

Bhagavan taught us a lesson by doing the work himself. A room near the kitchen was dirty and dusty and was rarely cleaned. Many people walked through the room but never thought of making it tidy, until Bhagavan himself took a broom and completely cleaned it. Several devotees tried to stop him saying, "Please, Bhagavan let me do this job. I will clean the room." Refusing to handover the broom he said, "Now your eyes are on it. Did you not see the mess before?" From that day on, the room was cleaned regularly.

Annamalai Swami moved to Palakottu (a colony abutting on the Ashram) in 1938. Till the end of his life in 1995, he lived peacefully and silently in his little ashram. He also provided spiritual guidance to seekers who wanted his help and guidance. We can see Annamalai Swami narrating some of his reminiscences in the video Guru Ramana.

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1. The same thing happened in regard to construction activity at Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad. The devotee-in-charge of construction told the compiler-editor how funds would come mysteriously in the Building Fund Donation Box at the Kendram, and the construction work did not suffer due to paucity of funds.
2. Dining room.
3. *Refer* 3rd para, p.160.

71

Mouni Sadhu (M. Sudouski), an Australian, authored the classic *In Days of Great Peace*. He lived in the Ashram for some months in 1949, after he got attracted to Sri Ramana through Brunton's *A Search in Secret India* (no.1).

At the age of 25 years, theosophy attracted my attention. I began practising concentration and meditation. After some years of rather fruitless efforts my enthusiasm began to diminish. I experimented with many schools of occultism, magic etc. Finally, I happened to get *A Search in Secret India,* the last two chapters of which convinced me that I had found my true Master. I started practising the path of self-enquiry in a Roman Catholic monastery in Paris. Months later I got firmly established on the path; but it was only in 1949 that the vital transformation took place in the presence of Sri Ramana.

I was struck by the softness and serenity of the gesture with his hand as if inviting me to come a little nearer, so simple and dignified that I immediately felt I was facing a great man. **All theories, all acquired knowledge fall into dust when standing face to face with the Maharshi. One gets peace that passeth all human understanding. Moments of inner experience with the Maharshi are so fraught with consequences that they may influence not only one but many incarnations. His face is full of inspiration, unearthly serenity and power, of infinite kindness and understanding. He reigns in silence.**

The atmosphere of utter purity and peace constantly radiated by the Sage compels us to examine and verify, as it were, all our beliefs and opinions; yet it comes by itself spontaneously, without any effort on our part; it is not imposed, it is simply the result of a sudden enlargement of consciousness. The inner process is accompanied by a sense of great happiness.

The glow, the reflection of the Real which I see through the Master illumines the mind. A wave of endless bliss surges through and overwhelms me. It carries me beyond thought, beyond suffering and grief, neither death nor change exist there, only infinite *being*. Time disappears – there is no need of it any more.

The Maharshi's spiritual alchemy could transmute the hard materialism into something pure and noble. Sometimes when I sat near him absorbing the invisible radiation of His light, I thought: "To whom and when can I repay this bliss? Who is it that is taking away the burdens and debts of my life?"The former young dreamer was now sitting at the feet of and face to face with a being who has solved all human problems.

The tragic comedy of earthly love now appears in all its unattractive nakedness before the tribunal of his consciousness. A new vision was entering the temple of my soul, just vacated by the impostors – a luminous ideal, incorruptible, pure, devoid of any stains of selfishness, resplendent with spiritual beauty and independent of all short-lived physical forms. Here was no more possibility of disappointment, of friction, and of mis-understanding.

The Maharshi has a strange power to awaken love for himself in the hearts of all. The devotion uplifts his pupils, incalculably raising the level of their lives, enabling them to touch the purest form of the power-energy which is perhaps the creator of the universe.

I have never seen, and undoubtedly shall never see in any other face, such an inexpressibly wonderful smile as the Maharshi's, a transcendent beauty reflected in physical form.

In the presence of the Saint the mind gets tuned to silence, and does not dare to indulge in endless questioning as it used to do.

The invisible, but in its influence the most efficacious, light emanated by the Maharshi brings about a total change in our opinions and in our appreciation of all the values of worldly life. **He is like the**

highest tribunal of our conscience, the Father Confessor whose 'very presence purifies us from all sins'.

In the presence of the Master, our mind ceased to be a hindrance to seeing Reality. I noticed for myself that questions and problems which sometime ago were unintelligible or postponed for later solutions got solved themselves.

Light and life are constantly flowing through the eyes of the Maharshi with a majesty and intensity unimaginable to those who have not seen them. A stream of peace, powerful yet sweet, flows from his eyes. They glow with a perfect understanding of all the weaknesses, defects and inner difficulties of those who look into them. Whenever the Maharshi spoke to us his eyes had much sympathy, wisdom and understanding. **An incredible loving kindness radiated from them.**

Like a lofty beacon whose beams point the way to a safe harbour for all on the high seas who are searching for a haven, so this great *Rishi* of India sheds light on those who have 'eyes to see and ears to hear.' I felt that this light permeates our being through and through to give us an insight into all the mistakes and imperfections of our 'ego', our little insignificant personality.

Being near the Maharshi one feels the presence of God as a matter of course – no arguments or proofs are necessary. The greatest miracle is the Maharshi himself. I know that not all are able to feel or even guess it. Such miracles can be known only by plunging into silence and into our own depths. The proximity of the Maharshi makes the effort of stilling the mind infinitely easier than it would be elsewhere. In the presence of the Maharshi we are able to find intuitively by ourselves the proper attitude.

I approach him to bid farewell. He looks into my eyes. He has seen each word in my mind even before I put them together. I bow my head and feel the touch of his hand on my brow, the delicate touch of his fingers along my head. A subtle current of power and purity passes through my whole frame. Like in a lightning flash I realise that the power of this moment will sustain me in all the years to come, and its light will forever shine on my life.

At his feet, I learned to stop the thought-currents in my mind, a thing that formerly devoured long years of effort and had never been completely successful despite the many exercises. **In some wonderful way, the Maharshi seemed to supervise the inner processes in**

us, just as an operator watches the working of a complicated machine, which he knows thoroughly. He mysteriously helped in the inner experiences, but how still remains closed to me. A man emerged from these experiences greatly changed and often with a totally different conception about everything in this world. For myself, I call it the 'spiritual alchemy of the Master.'

***In an article immediately after Sri Ramana's* mahanirvana *he wrote*:**

The light from those luminous eyes was forever engraved on my memory when leaving the Ashram. It would be ridiculous to say that the light of eternity has been extinguished. I know this light is not a material one, though it is conveyed through a material body. So his death did not deprive me of his reality.

There were most mysterious and inspiring evenings at the Ashram, when the beautiful hymn 'In Praise of the Lord of the Universe' (*Five Hymns on Arunachala*) was sung in the hall. Sri Bhagavan evidently loved the hymn, for there would appear a peculiar expression of other than human beatitude and delight on his face. And now I experienced once again, the same beautiful melody heard before with my outer ears.

Letters came from devotees from other continents. My friends tried their best to console themselves and me, saying that the physical departure of the Master could not break our spiritual link with him. And yet the ink in the last paragraphs of such letters was often blurred as from fallen tears.

***In an article sixteen years after the* mahanirvana *he wrote*:**

Enough time has now elapsed to permit us a certain desirable perspective of the luminous appearance of the Maharshi on the spiritual horizon of our small planet.

It is a well-known fact that in the Maharshi's presence everyone felt himself to be different and better than before in his everyday life. **The spiritual magnetism of the one who himself had found the final peace and wisdom could not fail to radiate on all of us,** just as the sun sheds its rays on everything and everyone, good and bad alike. That is beyond doubt.

When I realised the greatness of the Maharshi's achievements, I involuntarily turned to myself and said, "Here sits the sage without boasting of any titles or degrees, like the sun in comparison to my poor little candle." And then the first battle was won. I realised the emptiness of all human titles and degrees.

He taught us that the attainment is as much possible in a noisy London flat, as in a secluded ashram. And yet, so many people still worry because they were unable to undertake a long and costly journey to a 'holy place', in which they hope to achieve what they cannot otherwise.

72

Kumar was a Bangalore-based journalist.

Sri Maharshi sits on the bank of time and watches it flow, unmoved and unaffected. He is ageless and therefore the birthday has no significance to him. He is full and complete and perfect.

What a strange crowd is this *jayanti* [Birthday] congregation? It contains people who propelled by the self-destructive urge of their egos, sit before Sri Maharshi in a trance, allowing the latter's grace to bake their souls as much and as quickly as possible. It also has people who come to seek the Master's grace for perpetuating the conquests in the merry-go-round of life and for getting more if that could be prayed for and got.

Sri Maharshi is the magnet of attraction, and people try to use him in the way they want, for purposes they want. He is the sun whose rays of grace fall and dance on the minds and hearts that are open.

Sri Maharshi is today the repository and reflector of the spiritual traditions of India. Those who read the Upanishads and the *Gita* and wrangle over the immediate and the ultimate can see in him a silent achievement of the highest. Those who dig their spurs into the sides of their race-horse-mind and keep it hurrying towards worry and discontent, will see in **Sri Maharshi a God-man who has annihilated his mind and is therefore a perfect stillness and bliss.**

73

Swami Ranganathananda, a well-known *sannyasi* of the Ramakrishna Order, was, till his recent demise, President of Sri Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, Howrah (West Bengal).

I had been twice to Sri Ramanasramam. The first visit was in 1936. Bhagavan was an extraordinary personality who could draw the

minds and hearts of the people from all over the world. A verse in the *Srimad Bhagavatam* describes the nature of the holy person, attachment to whom becomes a liberating force. It is meant for those who are extremely tranquil, whose mind is like the calm ocean without waves, who are filled with compassion – a friend of all embodied beings. Another feature is that an enemy is yet to be born for such a person. This fine description fits our Bhagavan most.

The Maharshi had condensed in himself the immortal, the eternal. Hence the tremendous stature of his life. He lived amongst us like a simple human being. You could not measure him, just as the column of light of Siva which had once appeared in Arunachala.[*Refer* para 1, p.356.] You could not see the height, you could not see the depth.

Those who had seen the human form of Bhagavan are blessed indeed. **His touch was the touch of the immortal, a touch which elevates and makes you feel that you are also someone worthwhile.** In this age of physical verification, we find in Bhagavan, the human form of that eternal truth.

Bhagavan was constantly in the divine awareness – whether he was sitting alone and radiating his silent presence, whether he was correcting proofs, whether he was reading the newspaper, whether he was cutting vegetables in the kitchen, he was brimming with joy. **He was the very personification of the infinite, of the divine. Every word he spoke was charged with the wisdom of *atma vidya*.** He exemplified the great teaching 'I am that.' Bhagavan says that this experience is easy to come by. It is easy. There are no gymnastics to go through. It is just changing the centre of our awareness.

We have seen Ramana Maharshi; we read about Suka of the *Bhagavatam.* There is so much similarity between the two. They found delight in and were revelling in the Self-experiencing infinite joy, free from the bondage and yet filled with motiveless love. It is the eternal message manifesting in a human dimension whom we call Ramana the Maharshi.

There is a beautiful verse in Sankaracharya's *Vivekachudamani*, which is so apt for the Maharshi: 'Absolutely poor but full of happiness, no army behind but infinitely strong, no experience of sense satisfaction but always happy, none equal to him but he feels all to be his equals.' I would like to refer to just one instance.

When I arrived I had told him that I would be staying for three days and would leave by train on the evening of the third day. I had

forgotten. He looked at me at the right time and said, "Your *tonga* is arranged, it is time for you to go." How human – talking man-to-man, and yet how gigantic.

What is said of Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavatam* applies equally to Bhagavan.'The more we hear, the more the desire arises to hear more and more.' May all of us be worthy of this **tremendous spiritual dynamo who enters our heart even without our knowing it.**

74

Swami Desikananda – a *sannyasi* of the Ramakrishna Order, was head of the Vedanta College, Mysore, for many years.

It was divine grace that brought me to the presence of Sri Ramana in 1927. Entering the Ashram I saw the Maharshi seated on a couch, surrounded by devotees sitting at his feet. The whole scene was reminiscent of sages of yore. The Maharshi looked at me casually and made kind enquiries as to where I came from and about my stay.

Next morning, I went to the Ashram and sat before the Maharshi in meditation. I found I could easily concentrate in his presence and had progressively longer spells of undisturbed meditation such as I had never been able to achieve before anywhere else. When I told the Maharshi about it and how enjoyable it was, he asked me whether I was sleeping at the time of meditation. On my replying in the negative, he laughed and enquired about my mode of meditation, which was to concentrate on the light in the heart and offer a flower to my *ishta daivam* (chosen god) whenever the mind wavered, as instructed by Swami Sivanandji Maharaj, second president of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission.The Maharshi said it was all right for me and I could continue in that way.

Bhagavan's routine was to sit on the couch mostly in silence till noon and again after food, and a little rest. He used to look through the mail twice a day and go for a short walk on the Hill. He said on one occasion that since there was no mind at all, there was also no concept of anything. All was one full expanse in peace and happiness. He quickly added that we cannot even say one expanse, as there was no second. He was always immersed in *sat - chit - ananda* (existence - consciousness - bliss).

I told Bhagavan on the ninth day of my stay that I had to leave. Kneeling before him, I wept profusely. Consoling me, he said, "You can stay on. Nobody asked you to go." However, I took leave of him the next day.

By Bhagavan's grace not only was I drawn into the fold of a sage who had the highest realisation, but was helped in every way to experience periods of supreme peace and bliss. This indeed forms the sheet anchor of my life that was, that is, and that will be.

The silent aid and relief provided by Bhagavan will indeed remain an eternal spring of spiritual joy and peace.

In the end:

A Stanza in Sri Maharshi's Praise

How gracious art Thou Lord Dakshinamurthi
To have blessed mankind by Thy ministrations in human form.
To Bhagavan who is but the form of Satyam, Sivam and Sundaram
I offer my salutations again and again.

* * *

75

Pascaline Mallet, a French writer and seeker, whose book *Turn Eastwards* was appreciated by Sri Ramana, details her nine-months' pilgrimage in India in 1937.

In the Ashram we saw at one end of the hall a silent, motionless figure reclining on a low couch, lost in deep meditation, oblivious, it would seem, of everybody and everything. We slipped in quietly and seated ourselves on the ground amongst the crowd. I took in slowly the strange, unforgettable scene, my whole attention fixed on that central figure whose calm majesty, serene strength and perfect poise seemed to fill the whole place with unutterable peace. **To look into his eyes, shining like stars, was perhaps for the first time to know the meaning of Eternity and to be caught up into bliss that passeth understanding.**

Who was this Great one? On what rung of the ladder of human or superhuman evolution did he stand? Such questions have but little value. When the sun shines does one need to know why and how it shines? I opened my heart to the Spiritual Life which radiated so intensely in the

Silence. I had the impression of being as it were, surrounded by a sea of fiery Power, welding all present into a great Flame rising Heavenwards. Not once did the silent figure turn or move or show any sign of interest in the proceedings, that is, the recitation of the Vedas conducted as evening prayers in the Ashram. **It was as if he had been living in a sphere beyond the limitations of time and space.**

Later when we entered the *pandal* put up for the annual festival of the Maharshi's birthday, he was busy writing and reading. [*See* photograph no.18.] But somehow I had the feeling that all the while he lived in a state where time and space did not exist; in the region of the absolute, at the very heart of the universe. This can hardly be described, much less proved and only dimly sensed, but even so constituted a never-to-be-forgotten experience. **His utter impersonality and supreme detachment did not in the least exclude all-embracing compassion, sympathy, and understanding** of the many problems and difficulties which were continually being submitted to him by the weary, sorrow-striken people who come to him in the hope of finding comfort and help.

Undoubtedly, merely to live in his presence is the greatest help that one could possibly receive. It is a fact that no one who comes to the Ashram goes away empty-handed. Each receives to his utmost capacity, be that capacity great or small, and many people got inner experiences which have changed their lives.

The following is from the letter which Mallet wrote to Sri Ramana in 1939 from Versailles (France):

"Two years have come and gone since I crossed the threshold of Thy Ashram and yet in spirit I have ever remained there.

Though illusion still often veils the vision of Reality revealed in the blessed Silence of Thy Presence, though the Silver Thread of Self-awareness be often lost amidst changing light and shadows, still the inner urge to realize the Self remains and grows stronger and becomes more insistent as Grace and search go hand in hand.

At times, yet rare, with no apparent cause, spontaneous awareness of 'I' springs up and bliss fills the heart with glowing warmth.

I pray to Thee for light and guidance that I know are ever there, and at Thy feet lay offerings of unchanging love."

76

Gunturu Lakshmikantam was biographer of an outstanding devotee of Sri Ramana – Ganapati Muni (no.91).

My guru, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni used to always din into my ears the glory of Bhagavan Ramana. He would say, "I am just an atom. Bhagavan is the incomparable *Meru.*" [The legendary mountain.] He had assured me that he would take me to Sri Ramana personally and make me learn the *hridaya vidya* from him. I was eagerly looking forward to it. Then the bolt from the blue came. My guru attained *nirvana* in 1936. Everything was dark for me. I also lost hope of learning the truth from Bhagavan directly.

In June 1937, I went to Arunachala for *darshan* of Bhagavan. He was seated on a sofa. He was incomparable. His lustre would put to shame a thousand suns. He did not see us. There was no sign of his having noticed me. I felt discouraged. During the day, I was moving about in the Ashram. I crossed his path several times in order to catch his attention, but it was of no avail.

In the evening, Bhagavan was seated again on the sofa. All of a sudden he called Narasimham who was copying *Uma Sahasram* of Ganapati Muni in a notebook and asked, "Have you understood the meaning of the verses?" Narasimham replied, "I get their general drift but not their true import." Bhagavan said, "How come you do not understand? You are a scholar yourself "and he then said:

"The light of the Self travels from the heart to the mind and from there to various parts of the body. The discriminating one must, through incessant effort, turn the light back to the heart wherefrom it has arisen. Then one experiences the bliss of the Self. Though the heart is all pervasive, since the individual identifies himself with the body, a physical location, the right side, is indicated." While uttering the last words Bhagavan looked straight at my heart.

How can I describe the wonder of the experience which followed? I was simply bathed in joy, the kind of which I had never known before. He blessed me with the experience for which even the greatest *devas* [gods] are waiting with eager longing. It was almost as if he was saying, "You have got what Ganapati Muni had promised and that for which you have been so eager. Now it is up to you to make it your own by steadfast practice."

77

Ethel Merston, a French devotee, came to Sri Ramana in 1939. She settled down near Sri Ramanasramam for many years before and after Sri Ramana's *mahanirvana*. She wrote about her meetings with Sri Ramana in *The Call Divine*.

In 1937-38, a small group of seekers in Paris was discussing teachings of J.Krishnamurti and others. All of us had read Brunton's *A Search in Secret India* [No.1]. One of us – Pascaline Mallet [No.75] had visited the Ashram and been much impressed. Pascaline had asked me to help her to translate '*Who am I?*' into French. The book made a deep impression on me. We were curious to see the great man so eulogized by Brunton.

Bhagavan drew me to Tiruvannamalai in 1939. It took me a few moments after entering his hall to know that **I was in the presence of the greatest teacher I have ever met.** From the first moment in his presence he made me feel at home, and the peace in that little hall drew me as nothing had before. We had planned to stay for two days. When finally I had to leave, I knew that sometime I should return. The return came two years later and from then on for five consecutive years, I visited the Ashram each summer to sit in Bhagavan's presence.Then in 1944 with my work in North India coming to an end, I came to live permanently near him.

In the early days, the women sat on either side of the entrance, facing the couch, while the men sat down on the other side at the foot of the couch. Every kind of caste, creed and nationality came for *darshan*.To each and everyone, from maharaja to sweeper, Bhagavan was the same gentle twinkling-eyed friend. Newcomers including me, would begin by asking him questions, but soon found no necessity to voice them; in one way or another, without asking, the questions would be answered and problems solved.

Once I had been mulling over a problem for three days without finding the solution. The fourth day, while sitting opposite to Bhagavan, and still harassed by the problem, Bhagavan suddenly turned his eyes upon me. After a moment, he asked one of his attendants to find him a certain book of *puranic* stories; he turned over the pages until, finding the passage he wanted, he handed over the book to one of the men who knew English and told him to read the story aloud. That story gave me the answer to my problem.

He taught each seeker as suited his need. He was clairvoyant and could read our thoughts. Of psychic powers, I saw him use none, beyond **conveying thoughts silently and so powerfully that the vibrations would sometimes roll in waves down the hall almost hurting one by the force with which they impinged on the body,** not only of the recipient, for whom the thought was meant, but on many of us sitting there.

Bhagavan's gaze was spellbinding. Once an elderly *sannyasi* entered the hall. Bhagavan, who was reading, dropped his book immediately and looked straight up at the man who took two strides forward and stood near Bhagavan's feet, returning his gaze. There was such love and joy in Bhagavan's gaze that one could almost hear him say, "So you have come at last, my beloved brother."**The two went on gazing at each other, without a word spoken aloud, but I could literally feel them speaking to each other,** the flow of the current going back and forth between them. They talked thus voicelessly for some ten or fifteen minutes, then suddenly the *sannyasi* dropped to the floor and passed into *samadhi* for the next two hours. Bhagavan quietly took up his book again and went on, remaining as though nothing had happened, as doubtless indeed for him it had not. But for us it was an unforgettable experience.

Quite apart from solving our problems, or helping us to do so, just to sit in Bhagavan's presence was to realize or get a feeling of what true relaxation and a quiet mind might mean. It did not mean shutting oneself away, isolating oneself, on the contrary, it meant being with all, yet remaining within, being in the world and yet not of it.

During the last years of Bhagavan's life, we learned many lessons from him. But one, which he never ceased to hammer into us was that he was not the body, the body might go, but he would not go. He always was and always would be there with us, as now. I saw only three people cry as we spent the night keeping vigil of the corpse. We just knew that Bhagavan had not gone, so why cry for him, or rather, cry for a non-existent loss? We who knew him in the body are not the only ones to feel his presence. Even after he left the body, people in England who never knew him in the flesh, have told me that after reading about him, they have had the experience of his actual presence near them, even of his touch, ready with his grace to help.

78

A European Sadhak, who withheld his name

Sri Bhagavan is unique, peerless. One gracious and understanding look from him and a few sympathetic words from him had always meant oceans to the earnest seeker, to the aspiring pilgrim. And which sincere voyager hås gone to him and returned empty-handed?

The intellectual quibbler might have got short shrift from him. The dry philosopher might have found in him a steel wall. The eternal doubter would have returned from him not any better. But those who have unreservedly surrendered themselves to the pursuit of truth have never failed to find in him a great guide. Sometimes the sought-for guidance would come through an answer given to somebody's question. Sometimes it would be provided through a direct monosyllabic answer. And sometimes it would come through an actual experience.These experiences are intimate and are provided only for the personal spiritual advancement of the particular aspirant. It is, therefore, not usually considered necessary to take the world into confidence regarding such an experience. But since I have been invited to write on how Sri Bhagavan has been helping the aspirants, I venture to refer to just one experience of mine.

Once I was going on the eastern side of the hill in full belief and confidence that I had unreservedly surrendered myself to Sri Bhagavan. Suddenly, I saw a leper woman walking towards me. Her face was terribly disfigured by the disease. Her nose had been completely eaten away and in its place were found two holes. The fingers on her hands had all gone. She advanced towards me, and extending the stumps of her hands asked me to give something to eat. The sight of her disgusted me, frightened me. My whole frame shuddered with terror that she might touch me. Overcome with repulsion, I hastened to move away from her.

Suddenly, I heard the voice of Sri Bhagavan coming clear and ringing from across the mountain. It said, "To surrender to me is to surrender to every one, for the Self is in every one." Hearing this, I regained my poise and offered the leper woman the plantains that I had in my bag.

In a few minutes, I saw myself standing before not the disfigured woman but before a tall old man with white long hair and beard. The man looked like a *rishi* and was smiling. When the thought of prostrating before

the *rishi* entered my mind, I saw before me the old leper woman again. I bowed, happy at heart though somewhat confused in mind and then resumed my walk up the hill. I have cited this as just one of the ways through which Sri Bhagavan teaches, guides and helps.

79

M.A. Piggot was the first English lady who visited Sri Ramana.

I had visited India before, but my first visit off the beaten track was in 1932-33. It was my wish to meet one of the holy men of India, but so far it had been a vain one.Then I was told of Ramana Maharshi. The friend who gave me the welcome news offered to take me to him, and so we arrived at Tiruvannamalai.

He was seated on a divan in front of which sandalsticks were burning. About a dozen people were present in the hall. I sat cross-legged on the floor, though a chair had been thoughtfully provided for me. **Suddenly I became conscious that the Maharshi's eyes were fixed on me. They seemed literally like burning coals of fire piercing through me. Never before had I experienced anything so devastating – in that it was almost frightening.** What I went through in that terrible half hour, by way of self-condemnation and scorn for the pettiness of my own life, would be difficult to describe. **In the light of perfection all imperfections were revealed.**

When we returned for the evening meditation, the hall was compellingly still. The eyes of the Holy One blazed no more. They were serene and inverted. All my troubles seemed smoothened out and difficulties melted away. Nothing that we of the world call important mattered. Time was forgotten.

From that time onwards started a routine that was to be the same for many weeks.The rickety cart would turn up at six in the morning. It took me to the Ashram and came back again for the evening journey. I soon acquired a technique of balance that promised safety in the cart. I was given a small hut, seven feet by seven, for my use during the day; the Ashram did not provide night accommodation for ladies in those days.

Among those who had turned up at the Ashram was the well-known author, Paul Brunton.We had many enlightening talks. Asking questions in the open hall was rather an ordeal, but backed by him I lost

some of my diffidence. An interpreter was always on hand; for although the Maharshi understands English he does not speak it with ease. He knows immediately, however, whether the exact shade of meaning has been accurately translated, and if not, he perseveres until one has understood him completely.

One day we brought up the question of *gurushipp* and asked, "Is it necessary for spiritual attainment to have a guru?"The Maharshi ordered a certain treatise to be read, in which it was stated that as in all physical and intellectual training a teacher is sought, so in matters spiritual the same principle holds good." "And", he added, "it is hard for a man to arrive at the goal without the aid of such a one." I turned to him and said, "But you had no guru."

A rustle of shocked horror ran through the hall. But the Maharshi was not in the least disturbed by my thoughtless remark. On the contrary, he looked at me with a twinkle in his eye.Then he threw back his head and gave a joyous whole-hearted laugh. It endeared me to him as nothing else could. A saint who can turn the laugh against himself is a saint indeed!

One day a man rushed in and flung himself face down before the Maharshi. He was crying bitterly. Great sobs tore his body. The Maharshi said nothing. His head was turned aside, and he seemed indifferent. After some little time, the violence of the man's grief subsided and gradually he became quiet. Then at last, reverently the man arose and made a deep salutation.**The Maharshi turned his head and smiled upon him. I felt suddenly as if all the flowers of the world had poured their fragrance into our midst.**

Another time a poor person who had been bitten by a snake was brought in and laid before him. We all watched, fear gripping our heart. Not so he, who sat looking into the far distance, while the victim writhed in pain. Calm and compassion was in that look, and infinite peace. After what seemed like hours, the twitching ceased and the man appeared to be in sleep. Then the one who had brought in the sufferer gently touched him. The man rose, prostrated himself before the Maharshi and went out cured.

But this was unusual. The Maharshi did not heal in the accepted form of the word. Talking about it one day, I asked him if one could use spiritual power for healing. He remarked, "Yes, if you think it worthwhile," but added, "it required a great deal of force, which might be used more profitably in other directions."

That afternoon I had my farewell talk with the Maharshi. He was so gentle and human. I again asked about the relation of the body to the

'I'. He gave his smile, and said, "You came up from the bungalow this morning in a cart, yet you do not say, "The cart came." You say, "I came up." You did not make the mistake of identifying yourself with the cart. In the same way, look upon your body as you do the cart. Treat it well, and it will be a good servant and instrument. But do not be deceived into thinking it is 'I'. At the end of our talk, he quoted that wonderful saying from the Upanishad, "When, to the man who understands, the Self has become all things, what sorrow, what trouble can there be, to him who has once beheld this unity?"

I had been in despair of ever getting the Maharshi alone. It is hard to unburden the soul before a crowd. One morning, I went into the hall early and found him there unattended, emanating a wonderful stillness and peace. I asked quietly if I might talk with him. He nodded and smilingly sent for someone to translate. My first question was, "What are the hindrances to the realisation of the true Self?" He said, "Memory, chiefly habits of thoughts, accumulated tendencies." When I enquired, "How does one get rid of these hindrances," his answer was:

"Seek for the Self through meditation by tracing every thought back to its origin, which is only the mind. Never allow thought to run on. If you do, it will be unending. Take it back to the starting place – the mind – again and again, and the thought and the mind will both die of inaction. The mind only exsits by reason of thought. Stop that and there is no mind. As each doubt and depression arises, ask yourself, "Who is it that doubts? What is it that is depressed?" Go back constantly to the question, "Who is the 'I'? Where is it? Tear everything away until there is nothing but the source of all remains. Live always in the present; there is no past or future, except in the mind."

Regarding meditation, he said, "Meditate on what you are in Reality. Try to realise that your are not the body, emotions or intellect." As the days passed, I saw more and more clearly that this was no theoretical philosophy. He himself lived it continuously and joyously.

He was one of the few I have met who were not only happy but untroubled. Not that the sorrows of the world left him untouched, but he knew where they belonged and was not identified with them. To any sufferer his compassion was unlimited.

As I went to say goodbye in the evening, the Ashram people clustered around for my departure, I felt I had made and was leaving true friends. They were so simple and so genuine.

80

J.P. Vaswani is Head of the Sadhu Vaswani Mission, Pune.

It was my great good fortune to have had *darshan* of Sri Bhagavan – to have sat in his purifying presence – to have gazed into the liquid depths of his mystic, luminous, compassion-filled eyes – to have listened to his words of wisdom, which centred around the question, which indeed is a question of all questions – the one eternal question, which if you once answer you will have no more questions to answer, namely, 'Who am I?' 'Who am I?' 'Who am I?'

This happened in 1939. He sat in the Ashram hall on a couch. As I went and sat in the midst of the devotees I recalled to my mind the picture of Dakshinamurthi – the eternal youth, seated on a raised platform, and at the feet of this young teacher, sat a number of old *rishis* with white flowing beards and underneath the picture were written the words: "The teacher sits in silence. His teaching is silence and the disciples' doubts are cleared."[1]

Sri Bhagavan sat in silence. His teaching was silence. Many came to him – many from the East and some from the West. They came bringing a hundred questions and a hundred doubts in their hearts, but no sooner did they enter into his purifying presence than their minds were stilled. They were filled with a strange feeling of peace. They forgot their questions and their doubts. His silence was so profound. His silence was so sublime. His silence was so unique. Sri Bhagavan says, "The guru's silence is more vast and more emphatic than all the scriptures put together." Sri Bhagavan's silence was not passive. His silence was utter and complete. It was the silence of the head and the heart put together. It was the silence of feelings and emotions and thoughts. We may stand in silence, but our minds are scattered and within us there is all the time the noise of unruly passion. Within us there is the clamour of conflicting desires. The master's silence was deep. It was the silence which is the depths of the realised soul.

Sri Bhagavan had realised God. But he did not forsake humanity. He came and lived in the midst of men to share with them the treasures of the spirit. He spoke in the language of the masses. He lived as the simplest, clad in but one loincloth, barely enough to hide his utter nakedness. From morn till eve and sometimes late in the night the people thronged around him. Everyone was welcome. He was a friend of all who came to him. He

took personal interest in their matters – matters such as the train by which they came, the food they ate, the deaths or marriages that had occurred in their families.

Sri Bhagavan said all spiritual paths could be brought together under two main categories. The first being Self Enquiry – *atma vichara*. Sitting in silence, entering into the silence of your Being, put to yourself the question again and again, 'Who am I?' As you sit in silence you find that there is a seemingly endless procession of thoughts. They come and crowd into your mind.

An effective method of slaying the entire army of thoughts, according to Sri Bhagavan is – whenever a question arises within you ask yourself, 'to whom does this question arise?' The answer naturally will be, 'to me'. Then ask yourself again 'who is that me?' 'who is that 'I'?' Every time that you put this question you will find that a thought which has come to lead you astray will itself slink away. In this way you will be able to strike down thoughts until one blessed day you will find that the mind is merged in the Heart, where shines the true Self – the divine Self. Through *persistent practice* and *sincere efforts* the mind can be merged at its source.The ego will vanish and the true Self alone will remain. This is the path of *atma vichara.*

The other path is *saranagati* – self surrender. "Surrender yourself fully and whole-heartedly to the One Universal Force," said Sri Bhagavan, "and you will become one with that Force."

In one of his most moving songs there are words on which I have meditated and as I meditated on those words my eyes were touched with tears. Sri Bhagavan says: "I came to swallow you, but you have swallowed me. Now there is peace between us, Arunachala!"[2]

Sri Bhavavan was a *jnani* of the highest order that the world has ever known. But remember, every true *jnani* is at the same time a *bhakta* and a *karma yogi.* Sri Bhagavan said, "Cast all your cares on the Lord. Throw all your burdens at His lotus feet. Remember, the Lord of the Universe is one who carries all burdens, why must you carry your burden yourself?" These are the words of Sri Bhagavan and every word that he uttered came out of the depths of his own realisation.

You may read all the *sastras* that are in the world. But what you gain by studying them will be nothing as compared to the gain you get through hearing a few words sitting at the feet of the self-realised guru like Sri Ramana Maharshi.

What wondrous love Sri Bhagavan had for the poor, forsaken and forlorn! When he was staying on the Hill, he once found that some low caste women returning from their work everyday in the heat of the mid-day sun, with throats parched with thirst, wanted to drink water. But as they belonged to a low caste they were not allowed to draw water from the well. Sri Bhagavan himself – Sri Bhagavan – Sri Bhagavan – what was his stature! But he himself would come out and wait for them. With his holy hands he drew water and when they said, "Samy, Samy, we are thirsty, give us a little water", he gave them the water. I sometimes feel that I am like those low caste women and again and again turning to the gracious face of the Maharshi, I say to him "Samy, Samy, give me the water of life!"and he will give it to every aspiring heart.[3]

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1. *Refer* annexure-V on Dakshinamurthi, p. 415.
2. A 108-verse poem addressed to mountain Arunachala. *Refer* Akshara-manamalai, p. 425.
3. This episode was mentioned by Sri Ramana himself to Suri Nagamma, *refer* pp. 93-4.

81

Swami Ramdas was the founder of the Anandashram, Kanhangad in Kerala. He authored the book *In Quest of God.*

***The story below is as told by Swami Ramdas to Dilip Kumar Roy (no. 8) and published in the book by Roy* The Flute Calls Still:**

One day, Ramdas went for the *darshan* of Ramana Maharshi and addressed him thus: Maharaj, here stands before thee a humble slave. Have pity on him. His only prayer to thee is that you give him thy blessings. The Maharshi turned his beautiful eyes towards Ramdas and looked intently for a few minutes into his eyes, as though he was pouring into Ramdas his blessings through those orbs. Then he shook his head as if to say he has been blessed. A thrill of inexpressible joy coursed through the frame of Ramdas, his whole body quivering like a leaf in the breeze. Ramdas had gone to the Maharshi in a state of complete obliviousness of the world. He felt thrills of ecstasy in his presence. The Maharshi made the awakening permanent in Ramdas.

Some people asked Ramdas, "You went to the Maharshi and you got illumination. Give us illumination like that." Ramdas responded, "You must come to Ramdas with the same spirit as he went to the Maharshi. Where was his heart? How intense was his longing? What was the world to him at that time? If you come in that state you then you also get it."

Extracts from Ramdas's poem:

My Beloved Bhagavan

What shall I say to Him who towers high
A veritable Everest of spiritual glory –
A resplendent sun who sheds light on all
He is our soul, our life and sole refuge.
The sage par-excellence dwells on the Sacred Hill
Arunachala – the abode of holy ones – the Rishis.
His compassionate eyes pour forth nectar on all He sees
Drowning us in a sea of joy and ecstasy.

* * *

He belongs to the dizzy heights
Still he stands firm on this earth of ours.
Lo! Thy grace drew me to Thy feet
And I came to Thee a vagrant and a beggar.
The instant my head touched Thy holy feet
The fever of my soul left me forever.
Then Thine eyes, redolent with Thy Infinite Grace
Tenderly looked on me and I was thrilled.
I stood before Thee – a figure of pure bliss
Fully bathed in Thy divine halo.
Now, I am Thy child – free and happy.
Thou art my Mother, Master and Friend, my only Beloved.
All glory to Thee! All glory to Thee!

* * *

82

Swami Tapovanam was guru of Swami Chinmayananda.

Silence is Truth. Silence is Bliss. Silence is Peace. And hence

Silence is *atman*. To live this Silence should be the Goal. It is *moksha*. Sri Ramana Maharshi was an embodiment of such a Silence. He was the Silence itself.

I had the good fortune of having *darshan* of the Maharshi at Tiruvannamalai when he was living in a cave along with his mother and brother. A young *brahmachari* at that time, I climbed the hill and saw the Maharshi there. The Maharshi looked lovingly into my face. That was all. He spoke but Silence. Not a word passed between us. A supreme, dynamic and divine Silence prevailed. An hour passed by, all in Silence. He rose for his meals *(bhiksha)*. I too rose from my seat, bowed again and walked down the hill. The divine Silence sank deeper and deeper into me at each step! Someone came running behind me and pressed me to take some *prasadam*. I was full – full with the Silence. The Maharshi called him back and advised him not to press me. Then I left the cave and walked away.

The Maharshi was an idol of Peace and Silence. The ocean's surface dances in waves, laughs in sparkling foam, roars as its thunderous waves clap and clash! And yet deep in its inner vaults it rests in eternal Silence and Peace. Without such a divine and spiritual depth, the work and activities of this universe would become worthless and aimless. Work should be undertaken and pursued to take us ultimately to the workless Abode of Divine Silence and endless Peace. This is the secret doctrine of all our Vedas and ancient scriptures.

83

Swami Chinmayananda (Balakrishna Menon) was the founder of the Chinmaya Mission.

I was just emerging from high school, exams were over. On a package railway ticket I was roaming through South India. As the train steamed through the countryside at a halting speed, most of the passengers in my compartment suddenly peered through the windows in great excitement and bowed reverently to an elaborate temple beyond. Inquiring about it, I was told that it was the Tiruvannamalai Temple.[1]

Thereafter, the talk of my fellow travellers turned to Ramana Maharshi. The word 'Maharshi' conjured up in my mind ancient forest retreats and superhuman beings of divine glow. Though I was at that time

a convinced atheist, I was deeply drawn to visit the Maharshi's Ashram. I chose to take the next available train to Tiruvannamalai.

At the Ashram I was told that the Maharshi was in the hall and anybody was free to walk in and see him. As I entered, I saw on the couch an elderly man, wearing but a loincloth, reclining against a round bolster. I sat down at the very foot of the couch. The Maharshi suddenly opened his eyes and looked straight into mine: I looked into his. A mere look, that was all. I felt that the Maharshi was, in that split moment, looking deep into me – and I was sure that he saw all my shallowness, confusions, faithlessness, imperfections, and fears.

I cannot explain what happened in that one split moment. I felt opened, cleaned, healed, and emptied! A whirl of confusions: my atheism dropping away, but scepticism flooding into question, wonder, and search. My reason gave me strength and I said to myself, 'It is all mesmerism, my own foolishness.' Thus assuring myself, I got up and walked away.

But the boy who left the hall was not the boy who had gone in some ten minutes before. After my college days, my political work, and after my years of stay at Uttarkashi at the feet of my master, Tapovanam [No.82], I knew that what I gained on the Ganges banks was that which had been given to me years before by the saint of Tiruvannamalai on that hot summer day – by a mere look.

During the course of a talk in 1982 the Swami said:

Sri Ramana is not a theme for discussion; he is an experience; he is a state of consciousness. **Sri Ramana was the highest reality and the cream of all scriptures in the world.** He was there for all to see how a Master can live in perfect detachment. Though in the mortal form, he lived as the beauty and purity of the Infinite.

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1. *Refer* annexure – I, p.410.

84

Swami Muktananda was the founder of the well-known ashram at Ganeshpuri near Mumbai.

Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi was a great saint who always

occupied a high place of reverence in the minds of people; his divine personality endeared him to all beings. The word 'Ramana' means 'One who plays' *(rameti iti Ramana)*. You may call him '*atman*' or 'Guru'; both are synonyms indicating the same divine power of which this universe is a game.

Ramana Maharshi was a divine soul, completely detached, beyond all differences, highly self-restrained and playfully living in the ocean of transcendental consciousness. I had the good fortune to be in his company just for three days. Even during that short stay I found that anyone entering his presence even for a moment would experience the state of a fully realized soul in a transcendental state, beyond all thoughts. Some believed him to be a *siddha* or great saint, and some believed him to be an incarnation of God. **Anyone going even once to the Maharshi felt as if the Maharshi belonged to him.This was because he really belonged to everyone and everyone to him.**

Wearing only a loincloth, he used to sit relaxed on a sofa, but still he looked more attractive than even the most richly attired princes because, as my revered gurudev Nityananda used to say, **the Maharshi was beyond body-consciousness, beyond all attributes and beyond dualities.** This indicates that he was on a plane far above the body pain and pleasure, a plane inaccessible to most of us mortals. Realization of the Self was all-important in his teaching: to everyone who asked he unhesitatingly gave the advice to meditate on the Self, worship the Self and know the Self. This is because, according to Vedanta, there is nothing worth knowing, hearing or seeing except one's true Self.

The path in quest of truth shown by him will remain accessible to all for a long time to come, because he proclaimed absolute truth which remains unobstructed at all times, in all places and under all conditions. His message appears to some the oldest among the old, to others the newest of the new. Actually it is ancient and modern at the same time because the concepts of old and new are imposed on the Self by others, while it is really ageless and eternal. Some people call the present times a new age, but according to the Maharshi all things, old or new, are projections of the same eternal truth.

Those who loved the Maharshi got from him the true supreme bliss attained by means of *jnana, yoga* and *bhakti.* He is the ever-adorable Great Soul. My adorations to him.

85

Eliot C. Clark was a renowned American painter who visited Sri Ramana in 1938.

The Maharshi sits half reclining upon a raised divan. He wears only a loincloth. I have no preconceived thought but pass before his presence respectfully. He seems quite oblivious, and if he has noted the stranger there seems no reaction or awareness. Although I am the only foreigner present, no one seems to have any visual or curious interest. I sit among others on the floor. No word is spoken.

My attention is at first a purely objective one. I study the head of the Maharshi. He is a man past sixty, with hair close cut and white, a short moustache and a beard, his complexion rather light. His features are not typically Hindu.The back of his head is unusually full and round; high forehead, the brows almost in the center of the head, the eyes high set, the ears long and pronounced, the body in a state of composure.

A tall, dark-skinned pilgrim enters. He is nude to the waist. Then a woman enters. She kneels, bows her head three times.The Maharshi shows no sign of recognition.

The collective quietude creates a natural tranquility. Objective thought and self-consciousness gradually subside and one merges in the prevailing unity.

At the moment I have deliberately ceased my curious interest and am about to close my eyes in reverie, the Maharshi's head is slightly turned, his eyes meet mine and there is an inexpressible radiance, the slightest indication of a smile. Then visual awareness ceases.

The teaching of the Maharshi is very simple.Quite impersonal in content, it can only be realized by personal practice and experience. The real teaching is in the revelation of silence: when the perturbation and the fluctuations of the mind are stilled, the inner presence radiates itself.He says: we know the mind only by its change; just as one is aware of the motion from a static standpoint. The mind, like motion, is a relative movement. We are made aware of its presence by change. But if the mind turns inward in quest of its origin, the 'I'-awareness vanishes in its Source. The 'I' becomes identified, not with its egotistical consciousness and the world of change but with its Source, which is constant. 'I'-consciousness is relative and finite; but the Source is infinite and eternal. In the womb of silence the light is ever shining.

The Maharshi does not lecture. He will answer questions; but in the magic of his presence the questions begin to vanish with the quietening of the mind.

86

Swami Abhishiktananda earlier in his life was a Christian monk called Father Henri Le Saux, who felt that Christian priests, as *sannyasis* would find acceptance in India. He studied Hindu scriptures and experimented with the devotional and meditational practices they recommend. He authored *Sacchidananda, Guru and Disciple* and *The Secret of Arunachala.*

Sri Ramana's devotee Purusha [Fr. J. Monchanin] and I entered the hall, saluted the Maharshi respectfully and sat among the crowd. I concentrated on looking with attention at the Maharshi, of whom I had read and heard so much. However, despite my fervent expectation – or rather perhaps because of it – I felt let down, and in my disappointment, sadness filled my heart. I continued to gaze intently at the Maharshi.

At eleven O'clock the gong sounded for meal. Following the Maharshi, we all made our way to the dining hall. Purusha and I, as this was our first meal, had the privilege of being seated exactly in front of the Maharshi. All the time while I was eating, my eyes scarcely ever left the Maharshi; so eager was I to discover his secret. He was sitting on the floor just like us, ate with fingers from a plantain leaf as we did, and had exactly the same food as ours. This was a principle that he maintained inflexibly; since the beginning of his *tapas* he had always vehemently refused to touch anything that could not be shared freely with all and sundry.

Once again and without doubt, I could see him as an excellent grandfather. But the halo? In vain I strained my eyes trying to see it; all my efforts were useless.

After the midday meal, Purusha took me to meet Ethel Merston [No.77] whom he had met on a previous visit. She asked for my impressions, and as I did not wish to conceal the truth, I told her of my disappointment. She said, "You have come here with far too much 'baggage'. You want to know, you want to understand. You are insisting that what is intended for you should come to you by the path which you have determined. Instead you should make yourself empty and be receptive."

Did I really try to make myself empty on the lines suggested by Ethel? Or rather, was it the fever itself that got the better of all my efforts to meditate and reason? When the Vedas began again,[1] their spell carried me off much further from things and from myself than had been the case on the previous evening.

The fever, my sleepiness, a condition that was half dreaming, seemed to release in me zones of para-consciousness in which all that I saw or heard aroused overwhelmingly powerful echoes. Even before my mind was able to recognise the fact and still less to express it, the invisible halo of the Sage had been perceived by something in me deeper than any words. Unknown harmonies awoke in my heart…**In the Sage of Arunachala I had discerned the unique Sage of the eternal India,** the unbroken succession of her sages; it was as if the very soul of India penetrated to the very depths of my own soul and held mysterious communion with it. It was a call which pierced through everything, and opened a mighty abyss.

By the evening I knew that I had to leave. The fever was getting worse. Again, the half-hour of jolting in the bullock cart, an exhausting night on the railway in crowded compartments. Next morning I simply fell into bed and stayed there for three days, unable to move.

But if the body was there, stretched out under the bedclothes, the spirit was still at Sri Ramana's Ashram. The Vedic chants, as I had heard them there, still continued to sound in my ears. Before my eyes still danced the picture of the old man stretched out on his couch and of the crowd, which pressed devotedly, round him. In my feverish dreams, when I was neither fully awake nor fully asleep, it was the Maharshi who unremittingly appeared to me.When I came to myself again after those days of fever, I realized to what a depth in myself this first meeting with Sri Ramana had penetrated as part of the mystery of Arunachala.

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1. The usual recitation from the Vedas at the Ashram.

87

Ramanadasa Sadananda (Seshagiri Iyer), a teacher in P.S.High School, Madras, first visited Sri Ramana in 1915. He authored *Sri Ramana Dasakam* (Tamil).

I stood before Sri Ramana, the blazing sun of wisdom, at the Virupaksha Cave. Never having seen such a being of bliss before, I could not think, speak or do anything except to feel dumb-founded. I prostrated before him, drank with avidity the nectar of his gaze on me, felt myself freed from the pairs of opposites, and lifted above the never-ending din and misery of worldly existence. **Contagious was his bliss! He not only sends forth beams of the light of *jnana* by his mere proximity but also fills even the unhappy among us with joy and peace by his very presence.**

I myself went with a heavy heart at first, tossed and troubled by misfortunes, haunted and hooted by cares and anxieties, worried and flurried by soul-killing thoughts. If there is a place where such oppressing and depressing ideas and feelings could disappear all of a sudden, as dew or darkness dies before the sun, will any man hesitate to call it *Kailasa* itself or its Lord Mahadeva himself?

A doctor may cure a patient of his sickness. Attractive natural scenery may restore for some time cheerfulness to a troubled mind. But where else, if not at Tiruvannamalai, could one find a place which can easily rid one of all earthly woes and transport one to a Realm Divine, the joy of which none who has not tasted it could tell!

At another time when I prostrated with my eyes impressed on the sacred lotus feet of Bhagavan and begged of him to save me from the crushing blows of cruel *maya,* I found the panacea for which I was panting as the divine lips parted to say, "Whom do all these (worldly woes) seem to trouble? Put that question to yourself as often as you feel troubled. Thou art not the body, which will perish one day. Know that thou art the *atma* of unmixed bliss. How then could any worldly bugbear affect you?" His gracious words wrought a miracle. I was suddenly raised above the cloud of misery that had enveloped and distressed me till then. That very moment my dejection disappeared. I cannot say which way it went. I felt as if I never knew sorrow or misery in any shape. My mind was sunk in a sea of joy. **That divine magician's word had its desirable balmy effect forthwith.**

Day by Day with Bhagavan *by Devaraja Mudaliar (no. 37) records:*

When Bhagavan was at the Skandasram, I [Ramanadasa] was sitting on the steps leading up to the Ashram. A man came to the Ashram with his family and stopped at the gate. He asked whether they could have

the Swami's *darshan,* because untouchables could not think of entering the Ashram. I wanted to ask Bhagavan, but then I hesitated and allowed them to go inside. The whole party went in and prostrated before Bhagavan. I well remember how for about ten minutes Bhagavan's gracious look dwelt on that untouchable and his family; and how many rich and notable people have I seen falling at his feet without being vouchsafed such grace.

88

Dr. M. Anantanarayana Rao was for a long time doctor-in-charge of the Ashram's dispensary.

In July 1929, while travelling in a train, a fellow passenger gave me a photo of Sri Ramana and also told me where he resides. Almost immediately thereafter I went to England on study leave. On my return, being busy with my official duties, I forgot about the incident of the photograph. In May 1932, when I had to go to Tiruvannamalai on official duty, I suddenly recollected the incident.

I went to see Sri Ramana. He was sitting in the open space near the Ashram well. I asked him a couple of questions about my problems when I meditated. His answers were short, clear and to the point. I at once felt his greatness. My first visit to the Ashram ended in a couple of days, but Sri Ramana's smile and sparkling eyes had an irresistible influence on me.

In 1942, I took long leave preparatory to retirement and lived near the Ashram. In September that year I wished to see the Gurumurtam and the adjoining garden where Sri Ramana stayed and did *tapas* in the 1890s. When I returned after visiting the place Bhagavan asked me what I saw.

He then described to me the condition in which he then used to be. He said that at one moment he felt it was morning and at the next moment it was evening and that he was in a blissful state. He added how happy he then was.

As we heard his description, we were transported into a very happy condition and when he stopped his narrative we felt as if we were suddenly dropped down back into the humdrum life of a busy world. His grace flowed into us and made us happy.

Many people have experienced happiness when they sat in Sri Bhagavan's presence even without a word being spoken!

I have had the privilege of massaging Sri Ramana's legs, feet and arms once when he had a shooting pain in the thigh up to the hip; I took his permission to rub the part with some wintergreen oil. This gave him relief. I then asked him to lie down on the bed and not to recline on the pillows as he usually did. He smiled and said in his usual way that he had not slept flat on the ground or on the couch ever since he came to Tiruvannamalai. He told me that he could get in a few moments as much or more rest than what we could by sleeping on a nice bed for hours. This puzzled me for some time and then it struck me that Sri Ramana could establish himself into *samadhi* of which we had no experience.

Bhagavan was always awake though in a state of *samadhi*. Once I went to him with a small pot containing an ointment, which he wanted. As I heard him snore lightly I thought he was asleep. I stood thinking whether to keep the pot on the shelf quietly or wait till he was awake. Within a moment he opened his eyes, smiled and asked me why I was waiting without handing over the ointment to him. I replied that he was asleep and I did not wish to disturb him. Sri Bhagavan at once asked me how I concluded that he was asleep. I mumbled some reply, handed over the pot to him and sat in the hall along with some others. Bhagavan again closed his eyes and was snoring lightly.

At that time as some *bhakta*, a newcomer to the Ashram, came near the couch and prostrated, he at once opened his eyes and smiled at him. Again, Bhagavan reverted to the sleepy condition. When an Ashramite came and prostrated, he did not open his eyes, but practically on the Ashramite's heels came a newcomer who prostrated and Bhagavan immediately opened his eyes, saw him and smiled.

In December 1948, while I was massaging Bhagavan's hand, I felt a small nodule above his elbow. In July 1949, the damaged tissue flared up. I begged him to make a resolve to heal himself. He smiled and sat silent till I repeated my request. He then answered, "There is no mind here, so the question of a resolve does not arise."

To Bhagavan, the body with its ills did not exit. While dressing a large wound, pain is inevitable, but he did not show any pain and even assisted with his right hand in adjusting the bandage, as if it were an arm belonging to another.

During dressing of the tumour, I had to wipe it with rectified spirits. One day the spirits from the swab flowed on his arm and body. He at once said that he had a 'spirit bath' and that all should have such baths. I did not understand the significance of this and asked him to kindly explain the same.

He smilingly said, "Fish are always in water and cannot survive on coming out of it. Similarly, we are in Spirit or Pure Consciousness and should always be in it as fish in water. One should always consciously remain in Pure Consciousness or Self." That made me believe that he was always in *sahaja samadhi*. Often on seemingly small matters he spoke great words of instruction. Those instructions had a grip on us.

In the course of a conversation in 1949 he described to us that tears flow from the outer canthus of the eye of a man when he is very happy and from the inner canthus when he is sad. It is a correct observation. On the evening of his *nirvana* day (April 14, 1950), I was in that room among others. At his request he was assisted to sit up, with legs stretched in front. He had kept his eyes closed, and his breathing was gradually becoming shallow. The devotees outside began singing 'Arunachala Siva'.[1] He opened his eyes, looked at the direction from where the voices came and then closed the eyes. Tears came gushing from the outer canthus of the eyes. I felt that it was the visible sign of the Supreme Bliss of rejoining the ONE without a second. The body was discarded very peacefully.

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1. The refrain of famous hymn composed by Sri Ramana in praise of Mountain Arunachala. *Refer* annexure-I, p.410.

89

N. Ramachandra Rao authored Sri Ramana's first biography in Kannada.

I was a school teacher in Ooregaum. After my retirement I settled down in Bangalore. I first came to know about the greatness of Bhagavan in 1918. Immediately I went to Tiruvannamalai and met him at the Skandasram. He enquired about my name and the place from which I had come, and graciously asked me to partake of food at the Ashram.

His *darshan*, his gracious enquiry, his affectionate feeding, had a tremendous impact which cannot be adequately described in words. Just as a magnet attracts a needle, I got attracted to him. Thereafter until Bhagavan's *mahasamadhi* I used to visit and stay with him whenever I got an opportunity.

A few months after my first visit, I took my wife with me. Bhagavan, with great love made us sit on a platform and served us food with his own divine hands. I cannot adequately praise the rich sweetness of the holy *prasadam* we ate from his hands. My wife often used to feel

sick and could not eat any food. When we consulted the doctors they said that hers was a case of tuberculosis and hence nothing could be done. However, one day Bhagavan appeared in her dream and blessed her. Thereafter, to the great surprise of all, she was completely cured of her disease without any medical treatment.

In the evening, we felt an intense desire to worship Bhagavan's holy feet. Even though it was against the custom of the Ashram, and his disciples would not permit this, Bhagavan out of his abundant mercy knowing our ardent desire brought about a situation wherein those present went out for sometime for one reason or another. And we could offer *pada puja* to our heart's content.

But when I again went in 1923, he firmly declined repetition of the *puja* as was done by us earlier. It looked as though Bhagavan avoided traditional worship in view of the increasing number of visitors, who could also have asked for the same privilege. Moreover, Bhagavan was very much against worshipping his physical form in any manner.

90

Papaji (Hariwansh Lal Poonja) (1910-97), an Indian Army officer, was born at Lyalpur, West Punjab. Since his boyhood, his deep devotion to Krishna gave him vivid visions of the Lord.

After relinquishing his commissioned post in Indian army in favour of spiritual attainments, Papaji went from place to place and met numerous spiritual gurus including Swami Ramdas(no.81), Swami Sivananda, Swami Tapovanam (no.82) and Anand Moyi Ma, a devotee of Sri Ramana. But no one could answer his oft-repeated query: "Have you seen God? Can you show me God?"After all his journeys, when he returned home 'disillusioned and disappointed', a* sadhu *resembling Sri Ramana appeared at his door asking for food, which was given to him. Then the* sadhu *was asked: Can you show me God? If not, do you know of anyone who can? Papaji says:

Much to my surprise, the *sadhu* said, "Yes, I know a person who can show you God. His name is Ramana Maharshi and he lives at Tiruvannamalai." He gave me detailed instructions on how to reach there. I noted these down carefully. But I had spent all the money I had saved from

my brief spell in the army on my unsuccessful pilgrimages. Through an amazing coincidence, I came across an advertisement offering job to an ex-army officer in Madras. After I got the job, my employer gave me money to get to Madras and told me that I need not report for duty for one month, thus giving me an opportunity to be in the Maharshi's presence before I reported for work. It was 1944, and I was thirty-four years of age.

As per *sadhu's* instructions I reached Sri Ramanasramam. Before entering the hall, I peeped through the window and saw, sitting on a sofa inside, the same man who had visited my house in the Punjab. I was disgusted. I said to myself : "This man is a fraud. He appears in my house in the Punjab, tells me to go to Tiruvannamalai, and then hops on the train so that he could get here before me." I felt so annoyed that I decided to leave the Ashram.

As I was preparing to do so, one of the residents asked,"Haven't you just arrived?" I told him the story as to how I got cheated. The person said, "You are mistaken. He has not moved out of the town during the last 48 years. It is either a case of mistaken identity or somehow, through his power, he managed to manifest himself in the Punjab while his physical body was still here. Some girls from America came here once and told a similar story. These things do happen occasionally." This aroused my curiosity and I decided to stay.

I had lunch in the Ashram. At the conclusion of the meal the Maharshi went to the hall followed by his attendant. As he needed rest after lunch, devotees were not allowed to see him during 11.30 a.m. to 2.30 p.m. Not knowing this, I followed him. While his attendant was persuading me to come later, the Maharshi overheard the exchange, and I was allowed to get in.

I approached the Maharshi in a belligerent way, "Are you the man who came to see me at my house in the Punjab?"The Maharshi remained silent. I tried again, "Did you not come to my house and tell me to come here?" Again the Maharshi made no comment. Since he was unwilling to answer, I moved on to the main purpose of my visit. I asked, " Have you seen God? And if you have, can you enable me to see Him? I am willing to pay any price, even my life, but your part of the bargain is that you must show me God." He answered, "No, I cannot show you God or enable you to see God because God is not an object that can be seen. God is the subject. He is the seer." He also added, "You alone are God." His words did not impress me. I would have dismissed him and his words without a second thought had it not been for an experience I had.

As he looked at me and gazed into my eyes, my whole body began to tremble and shake. A thrill of nervous energy shot through my body. My nerve ends felt as if they were dancing and my hair stood on end. Within me I became aware of the spiritual Heart. This is not the physical heart; it is, instead, the source and support of all that exists. Within the Heart I saw or felt something like a closed bud. It was very shining and bluish. With the Maharshi looking at me, and myself in a state of inner silence, I felt this bud open and bloom. I use the word bud, but this is not an exact description. It would be more correct to say that something that felt bud-like opened and bloomed in my Heart. It was an extraordinary experience. It totally surprised me when it happened.

Though I had an immensely powerful experience, the Maharshi's statement that 'You alone are God' and his advice to find out who the seer is did not have a strong appeal for me. I thought to myself, 'It is no good to be a chocolate, I want to taste chocolate'. I want to remain separate from God so that I could enjoy the bliss of union with Him. My views on various religious practices were limited. I thought to myself, 'No one here in the hall seems to be chanting the name of God. How can they consider themselves to be good devotees? All these people may have been meditating but so far as I was concerned, they were wasting their time.'

I still had some time before I had to report for duty in Madras. But I did not want to spend it with all these 'spiritually lazy' people in the Ashram. I found a quiet spot in the jungle on the other side of the Hill, and settled down there to do my Krishna *japa*, alone and undisturbed. I stayed there for about a week, immersed in my devotional practices. Krishna would often appear before me, and we spent a lot of time playing together.

Before going to Madras to join my duty, I paid another visit to the Ashram, partly to say goodbye and partly to tell the Maharshi that I didn't need his assistance for seeing God because I had been seeing Him everyday through my own efforts. When the Maharshi asked where I had gone, I told him with a great amount of smugness that I was playing with my Krishna.

The Maharshi commented, "Very good, very nice. Do you see Him now?" I replied, "I see Him only when I have visions." The Maharshi said, "What is the use of a God who appears and disappears? If he is a real God, He must be with you all the time." The Maharshi's lack of interest in my visionary experiences deflated me a little, but not to the extent to make me listen to his advice. A lifetime of devotion to Krishna had left me incapable of conceiving the spiritual quest in any other terms than that of a

quest for a personal god. Having therefore got, in my jaundiced opinion, nothing from the Maharshi except a good experience and some bad advice, I returned to Madras to take up my new job.

I found a nice house to live, and began my work. All my spare time and energy were devoted to communing with Krishna. I synchronized the *japa* with my breathing. Calculating that I breathed about 24,000 times a day, I decided that I should repeat the name of God at least once for every breath I took. One day, I found that when I tried to resume my chanting, I could not repeat the name of Krishna any more. Somehow, my mind refused to cooperate. Not finding any solution to my problem, even after consulting well-known swamis in Madras, my thought turned to the Maharshi. I said to myself, 'This man came all the way to the Punjab in some form and directed me to see him at Tiruvannamalai. I went there and got a very good experience. I may as well go to him and see what he has to say.'

Taking a train to Tiruvannamalai, I reached the Ashram. In order to talk to the Maharshi alone, I went to the hall after lunch. As on my previous trip, the attendant wanted me to come later. But again the Maharshi intervened and I got an opportunity to tell him that for twenty five years I have been doing *sadhana*, mostly repeating the name of Krishna. Now my mind refuses to engage itself in thoughts of God. What has happened to me and what should I do? The Maharshi looked at me and asked, "How did you come here from Madras?" I did not see the point of his question but told him politely, "By train." Then he inquired, "What happened when you reached Tiruvannamalai?" "Well I took a bullock cart which brought me here."

The Maharshi then explained what he was driving at: "The train brought you to your destination. You got off it because you did not need it anymore. Likewise, with the bullock cart. Now you are here, they are of no use to you. That is what has happened to your *sadhana*. Your *japa* and your meditation have brought you to your spiritual destination. You yourself did not give up your practices; they left you of their own accord because they had served their purpose. You have arrived."

Then he looked at me intently. I could feel that my whole body and mind were being washed away with waves of purity. His silent gaze was purifying them. Under that spellbinding gaze I felt every atom of my body being purified. It was as if a new body was being created for me. A process of transformation was going on – the old body was dying atom by atom, and a new body was being created in its place. Then, suddenly, I

understood, there was a sudden impact of recognition as I became aware of the Self. The silent gaze of the Maharshi established me in that primal state that was permanent. The 'I' which had for so long been looking outside perished in the direct knowledge and experience of the Self, which the Maharshi had revealed to me. I cannot describe what the experience was, but I knew that my spiritual quest had definitely ended; and the source of that knowledge will always remain indescribable.

In a lifetime of spiritual seeking I have met hundreds of *sadhus,* swamis and gurus, but none of them could reveal the truth the way the Maharshi had done. I must make one more comment about the greatness of the Maharshi: he could see that I had reached a state in which my *sadhana* could never be resumed again. He knew I was ready for realization and through his divine look he established me in his own state.

After my final experience in the Maharshi's presence, my outer life went on much as before. I went back to Madras, carried on with my job, and supported my family. At weekends, or when I had accumulated enough leave, I would go to Tiruvannamalai, sit at the feet of my Master and bask in his radiant presence. The cynical, skeptical seeker, who aggressively confronted the Maharshi on the first visit, had gone for good.

In the first few months after my realization, I did not have a single thought. I could go to the office and perform my duties without ever having a thought in my mind. It did not take me long to realize that a mind and thoughts are not necessary to function in the world. When one abides as the Self, some divine power takes charge of one's life. All actions then take place spontaneously and are performed very efficiently, without much mental effort or activity.

On one of my visits to Tiruvannamalai, I took my seven-year old daughter with me. She sat before the Maharshi and went into a deep meditative trance. She spent several hours in that condition before returning to her normal waking state. Major Chadwick [No.42], who was watching all this, approached the Maharshi and said, "I have been here for more than ten years, but I have never had an experience like this. This seven-year old girl seems to have had this experience without making any efforts. How can this be?"The Maharshi merely smiled and said, "How do you know that she is not older than you?"

My daughter did not want to go back to Madras.The Maharshi advised her to first finish her education and then come back if she wanted to do so. If anyone asked her, "What happened that day when you were in trance before the Maharshi?" she could not answer and just cried.

I would sometimes accompany the Maharshi on his walks around the Ashram. I watched him remonstrate with the workers who wanted to prostrate to him rather than carry on their work. Everything he did contained a lesson for us. Every step he took was a teaching in itself. The Maharshi preferred to work in a low-key and in an unspectacular way. There was no demonstration of his power, just a subtle emanation of grace, which seeped into the hearts of those who came into contact with him.

One incident that I witnessed illustrates very well the subtle and indirect way the Maharshi worked. A woman brought her dead son to the Ashram. The boy had apparently died of snakebite. The woman cried and begged the Maharshi to bring him back to life, but he did not respond to her repeated requests. After a few hours, the Ashram manager made her take the corpse away. As she was leaving the Ashram, she met some kind of a snake charmer who claimed that he could cure her son. The man did something to the boy's hand where he had been bitten, and the boy immediately revived.

The devotees attributed the miraculous cure to the Maharshi, saying, when a problem is brought to the attention of a *jnani,* some 'automatic divine activity' brings about a solution. According to this theory, the Maharshi has done nothing consciously to help the boy, but at a deeper, unconscious level, his awareness of the problem has caused the right man to appear at the right place. The Maharshi, of course, disclaimed all responsibility for the miraculous cure. 'Is that so?' was his only response when told about the boy's dramatic recovery. This was typical of him.

The Maharshi never performed any miracles. The only 'miracles' he indulged in were those of inner transformation. By a word, a look, a gesture, or merely by remaining in silence, he could quieten the minds of people around him, enabling them to become aware of who they really were.

In July 1947, a month before Independence, Devaraja Mudaliar [No.35] told me about the problems which I could face if I did not bring my family to India from the Punjab, which was soon to become a part of Pakistan. I told him, "I am not going. I cannot leave the company of the Maharshi." I had reached a stage in my relationship with the Maharshi where I loved him so much, I couldn't take my eyes off him or contemplate the thought of going to the other end of the country for an indefinite period.

When Mudaliar told the Maharshi that Pōonja's family seems to be stranded in West Punjab and he did not want to go there, the Maharshi told me, "There will be a lot of trouble in the area you come from. Why

don't you go and bring your family out?" Though this amounted to an order; I was still hesitant. I then explained the main reason for my reluctance to go: "I am far too attached to your physical form. I cannot leave you. I love you so much that I cannot take my eyes off you."

"I am with you wherever you are," was his answer. From the way he spoke to me I could see that he was determined that I should go. I accepted the decision. I prostrated before him and for the first time in my life I touched his feet as an act of veneration, love, and respect. He will not normally let anyone touch his feet, but this was a special occasion and he did not object. Before I rose, I collected some of the dust beneath his feet and put it in my pocket as a sacred memento. I also asked for his blessings because I had an intuition that this was our final parting.

I left the Ashram and made my way to Lahore. The atmosphere there was every bit as bad as I had been led to expect. I went to the station and bought a ticket for my hometown – Lyalpur. In those violent days, Hindus and Muslims were travelling in separate carriages so that they could protect each other in case there was any trouble. The nearly empty carriages were those occupied by the Hindus. And then an inner voice, the voice of my Master, said to me, "Go and sit with the Muslims in their compartment. Nothing will happen to you there."

Superficially it seemed like a good idea, but I had a doubt about my ability to fool my Muslim fellow-passengers into believing that I was one of them. I dressed differently and had a highly visible *'Om'* tattooed on the back of one of my hands. I listened to the voice and took my seat with the Muslims. No one questioned my right to be there. Somewhere in the countryside, Muslims stopped the train and all the passengers in the Hindu carriages were gunned down. Nobody paid any attention to me, even though I was clearly a Hindu sitting in a Muslim compartment.

After disembarking from the train I went to my family home and found 34 members of my family, most of them women, stranded there. I succeeded in bringing them back safely to India.

The Maharshi had sent me to the Punjab to do my duty. That was typical of him because he never permitted his devotees to abandon their family responsibilities. Telling me, 'I am with you wherever you are', he sent me off to fulfill my obligations.

When I first heard this remark, I appreciated only its philosophical significance. It did not occur to me that physically I would also be under his care and protection. Yet this was manifestly the case. He had told me where to sit on the train. For more than twenty hours after the massacre,

I had sat unrecognized in a Muslim carriage, despite having pierced ears and an '*Om*' on my hand, both of them classic Hindu identification marks. Further, in an environment of utter anarchy I had secured seats for a vast contingent of my family and got them out of danger on the last train that left Lahore for India.[1]

I took my family to Lucknow because I had a friend there from my time in the army. There was no question of returning to the Maharshi because I was the only potential earner in my group. Arriving in India with little more than the clothes we were wearing, it became my responsibility to feed and support this vast group. I had to work night and day to keep the family going.

At 8.47, on the evening of April 14,1950 [2] I was walking down a street in Lucknow. I suddenly felt an enormous spasm in my chest, which nearly knocked me down to the ground. I thought it must be some sort of heart attack. A few seconds later I saw a few people pointing to a large meteor, which was trailing across the sky. This was the meteor that thousands of people all over India saw in the first few seconds after the Maharshi's death.

Many years later, sitting on the banks of the Ganges, I had an extraordinary vision of my various incarnations through time. I watched the Self moving from body to body, from form to form. It went through plants, through animals, through birds, through human bodies, each in a different place at a different time. The sequence was extraordinarily long. My own body finally appeared as the last one of the sequence, followed by the radiant form of the Maharshi.The vision then ended. The appearance of the Maharshi had ended that seemingly endless sequence of births and rebirths. After his intervention in my life, the Self that finally took the form of Poonja could incarnate no more. The Maharshi had destroyed it by a single look.

Sometime ago, at one of the *satsangs* which I used to conduct in Lucknow, a note handed over to me concluded: "My humble respects and gratitude to you, especially to one who was a disciple of Ramana Maharshi." I couldn't let this pass. I exclaimed, "Please correct your grammar. I *am* his disciple! He is my master. How can I throw him away into the past? I never think it is I, Poonja, who is speaking. If I ever thought that this person called Poonja was speaking to you, I have no right to sit here because whatever would come out of my mouth would be false. It is my own master who speaks. I am sitting here introducing you to my teacher and his teachings. He is the teacher; not I. Poonja has

gone for good, but the Master remains and will always remain. He is seated in my heart as my own imperishable Self."

[David Godman, from whose book *Nothing Ever Happened* the above has been extracted, says: Having just finished interviewing Papaji in 1992, about the events when he was at Sri Ramanasramam in the 1940s, I wanted to know as a conclusion, if he could say a few words of gratitude or appreciation, summarizing what the Maharshi did for him. Papaji opened his mouth to speak but no words came out. After two or three seconds tears started flowing down his cheeks. Turning his head to hide his tears, he said, "I can't answer that question. I can't speak about it. No words can ever express it."Godman however refers to a poem, which Papaji wrote to one of his devotees in 1982: 'My Master spoke in silence. / My Master spoke through his eyes. / My Master spoke through words. / All the three languages I have heard.']

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1. On an enquiry about any other case where Sri Ramana provided physical protection to a devotee as happened in case of Papaji, David Godman, who has done extensive research about Sri Ramana and his devotees, replied that he knew no other example of this nature.
2. The time when the Maharshi entered his *mahasamadhi*.

91

Ganapati Muni (1878-1936), a renowned Sanskrit poet and scholar, was known by his title Kavyakantha – one from whose throat poems came out spontaneously. After meeting Sri Ramana in 1907 and having got convinced of his spiritual attainment he, for the first time, called him 'Bhagavan' and 'Maharshi.' These got popular in due course. He compiled *Ramana Gita* which is based on the replies of Sri Ramana to spiritual questions put by the Muni and his friends. He has more than two dozen publications, mostly in Sanskrit, to his credit.

Ganapati Muni, a great Siva *bhakta*, chose Tiruvannamalai, the holy seat of Siva, for his *tapas* in 1903 and briefly met Sri Ramana on the hill. In 1907, when he came again to Tiruvannamalai he found that nothing tangible had emerged from his severe *tapas*. Disappointed, he climbed up the hill and fell flat on his face holding Sri Ramana's feet with both hands.

With a voice trembling with emotion he cried, "All that has to be read I have read. I have performed *japa* to my heart's content. Yet I have not up to this time understood what *tapas* is. Pray, enlighten me about the nature of *tapas.*"

After listening to the Muni, Sri Ramana silently gazed at him as he sat in anxious expectation. Then he said in Tamil, "If a mantra is repeated and attention directed to the source from where the mantra-sound is produced, the mind will be absorbed in that. That is *tapas.*" [1] This short instruction filled Muni's heart with joy. He stayed on the hill for some hours and composed five stanzas in praise of the Swami [2] in which he shortened his original name Venkataraman to 'Ramana', which has stuck to the Swami ever since. He wished his disciples to call him Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. The Muni must be given credit for this name.

In 1908, the Muni did severe *tapas* for 18 days in a Ganapati temple near Madras. On the 18th day, when he was lying wide awake he saw the figure of the Maharshi coming in and sitting next to him. Ever since his arrival at Tiruvannamalai in September 1896, the Maharshi had never left that place. When the Muni narrated the incident to the Maharshi in 1929, the latter recollected the event in the following words:

"One day some years ago, when I was lying down, I suddenly felt my body carried up higher and higher till all objects disappeared and all around me was one vast mass of white light. Then suddenly my body descended and objects began to appear. I said to myself, "evidently this is how *siddhas* appear and disappear." I was on a high road, on one side of which, some distance removed from it, was a Ganapati temple. I went in and talked, but what I said or did, I do not recollect. Suddenly I woke up and found myself lying in the Virupaksha Cave. I mentioned this immediately to Palaniswami."[Attendant of Sri Ramana.]

Once the *kundalini* rose in the body of Ganapati Muni. He suffered an unbearable burning sensation. The Muni felt that the pain would subside if Bhagavan touched him. The Muni's wife, son and some others took Bhagavan to the Mango Tree Cave, where the Muni lived. Bhagavan went there and sat beside the Muni, who took Bhagavan's hand and put it on his head and asked him to bless him. Bhagavan kept quiet for a while. "It will be all right soon," he said, and left. Ganapati Muni felt immediate relief. On his way back to the Skandasram Bhagavan said, "He told me, but to whom can I tell?" A devotee asked Bhagavan whether he also had a similar experience. 'Hm, Hm', said Bhagavan smilingly.

The Muni by his thorough mastery of the Sanskrit language and the ease and excellence of his Sanskrit poetry must, to some extent, have influenced the Maharshi who was always receiving new ideas and learning new languages from persons and books almost unconsciously. So long as the Muni lived in Tiruvannamalai, the Maharshi consulted him on matters of importance, especially publications and other activities of the Ashram.

T.K.Sundaresa Iyer records in his book **At the Feet of Bhagavan:**

After Ganapati Muni had composed 700 out of the 1000 verses of the *Uma Sahasram* in praise of the Divine mother, he announced that the complete work will be dedicated on a particular day in the Arunachaleswara temple.[3] On the evening of the dedication day, he found that 300 verses were still to be composed. When the Maharshi asked the Muni whether he was getting the event postponed, the Muni assured him that the task would be completed here and now. The scene that followed was unbelievable. The Maharshi sat silent and in deep meditation. The eager disciples of the Muni watched in tense admiration the sweet flow of Sanskrit verses as they came from the lips of Kavyakantha and wrote them down. The job over, Bhagavan opened his eyes and asked the Muni whether all that he said had been taken down. The Muni's grateful response was, "All that Bhagavan inspired in me has been taken down." It is noteworthy that whereas the Muni revised the first 700 verses of this monumental work some six times, he did not revise any of the last 300.

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1. The source from where the mantra-sound is produced is not merely the vocal organ but the central force from where the mind and the breath arise, that is, the Self.
2. Till then Sri Ramana was known by the name of Brahmana Swami.
3. *Refer* annexure-I, p. 410.

92

F.H. Humphreys came to India in January 1911 to join the Police Department as an Assistant Superintendent. His deep-seated spiritual inclination resulted in his meeting Ganapati Muni (previous entry), and through the help of S.Narasimham, who was the *munshi* to teach him Telugu, he along with Ganapati

Muni had an audience with Sri Ramana. The following account is from his letters to a friend in England, which were later published in the *International Psychic Gazette*.

Yesterday I got a day's leave and went to the Maharshi along with the *munshi* and Ganapati Muni. At two in the afternoon we went up the Hill. On reaching the cave we sat at his feet and said nothing. I felt lifted out of myself. For half an hour I looked into the Maharshi's eyes, which never changed their expression of deep contemplation. I began to realize that his body is the temple of the Holy Ghost; I could only feel **that the Maharshi's body was not the man; it was the instrument of God, merely a sitting, motionless corpse from which God was radiating terrifically.** My own feelings were indescribable.

The Muni then said I might speak. I asked for enlightenment and teaching. The Maharshi spoke a few sentences of broken English and in Telugu, which conveyed worlds of meaning. The most touching sight was the number of tiny children up to about seven years of age, who climb the hill, all on their own, to come and sit near the Maharshi, even though he may not speak a word or even look at them for days together. They do not play, but just sit there quietly, in perfect contentment.

The Maharshi is a man beyond description in his expression of dignity, gentleness, self-control and calm strength of conviction.

For his second visit, Humphreys was accompanied by Raghavachariar (next entry). This time A.S.Krishnaswami Aiyar (the District Munsif), who happened to be present, acted as interpreter. In the words of the Englishman:

I went by motorcycle and climbed up to the cave. The sage smiled when he saw me, but was not in the least surprised. He asked me a private question, only known to him and me. Evidently, he recognised me the moment he saw me. **Everyone who comes to him is an open book, and a single glance suffices to reveal to him its contents.**

"You have not had your food" he said, "and are hungry." I admitted that it was so. He immediately called a disciple to bring food – rice, *ghee*, fruit etc., eaten with the fingers, as Indians do not use spoons. Though I have practised eating this way, I lack dexterity. So he gave me a coconut spoon to eat with, smiling and talking during the time I ate. **You can imagine nothing more beautiful than his smile.** When I finished, I was still hungry, and he knew it and ordered more. He knows everything, and when others pressed me to eat fruit when I had had enough he stopped them at once.

Whilst I was eating, he was relating my past history to others and accurately too. Yet he had seen me but once before, and many hundreds in between. He simply turned, as it were, on clairvoyance. Later on I was thirsty, for it had been a hot ride, but I would not show it, come what may. Yet he knew and told a disciple to bring some lemonade. I sat for about three hours listening to his teachings. **It is strange what a change it makes in one to have been in his presence.** [*Humphreys retired from service some years later and became a Roman Catholic monk.*]

93

Raghavachariar was Superintendent of Public Works Dept. at Tiruvannamalai from 1910 onwards. He paid occasional visits to Sri Ramana.

Whenever Raghavachariar went up the hill in 1910, he found a crowd with the Maharshi in whose presence he felt disinclined to speak. One day he went up with an intent to submit three questions or requests: (i) Can you grant me a few minutes for private personal talk – free from the presence of others? (ii) I should like to have your opinion on the Theosophical Society of which I am a member. (iii) Will you please enable me to see your real form, if I am eligible to see it? He says:

When I prostrated and sat before him, there was a crowd of about 30 persons; but they gradually dispersed. So I was alone with him, and my first query thus got answered without my stating it. Then he asked me, of his own accord, if the book in my hand was the *Gita* and whether I was a member of the Theosophical Society, and remarked even before I answered his queries, "It is doing good work." My second question also thus being anticipated, I waited eagerly for the third.

After half an hour, I opened my mouth and said, "Just as Arjuna wished to see the form of Sri Krishna and asked for *darshan*, I wish to have *darshan* of your real form, if I am eligible." He was then sitting on a platform with a picture of Dakshinamurthi painted on the wall next to him. He silently gazed on as usual and I gazed into his eyes. Then his body and also the picture of Dakshinamurthi[1] disappeared from my view. There was only empty space, without even a wall, before my eyes. Then followed

a whitish cloud in the outline of the Maharshi and of Dakshinamurthi, before my eyes. Gradually, the eyes, nose etc. and other details were outlined in lightning-like lines. These got broadened till the figure of the Swami and Dakshinamurthi became ablaze with very strong and unendurable light. I closed my eyes in consequence. I waited for a few minutes and when I opened my eyes I found the Maharshi and Dakshinamurthi in the same form as before. I prostrated and came away.

The impact of the above experience was such that I did not dare go near the Maharshi almost for one month. Later, when I went up to the Skandasram, I narrated the above experience and requested him to explain. After a pause, he said, "You wanted to see my form. You saw my disappearance. I am formless. Ganapati Muni had a similar experience and you may consult him." I did not consult the Muni.

B.V. Narasimha Swami in his book* Self Realization *records:

Raghavachariar was coming to Maharshi off and on. His wife and mother feared that he might give up his social duties and become a recluse.They went to the Maharshi and told him their fear. The Maharshi consequently admonished Raghavachariar about the dangers of becoming a recluse without the severe training required for it. The Maharshi was giving similar advice to numerous others also.

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1. *Refer* annexure – V, p.415.

94

Manavasi V. Ramaswami Iyer was Supervisor, Public Works Dept., Tiruvannamalai in 1908. The following is a brief extract from his diary:

My soul was stirred and I appealed to him, "Sir, Jesus and other great souls came into the world to redeem sinners. Is there any hope for me?" The Swami said (in English) – "There is hope. Yes, there is hope." These are the very words and the following composition was born:

"Thou art my sole refuge; I have naught else to turn to. Oh Sweet and Fragrant Bouquet of Flowers, charming to the bees of the devotees swarming to thy feet."

From that time I began to frequent the Swami. It became a habit with me to sleep on the Hill every night, when at headquarters. Once I found him sitting calm. When after half an hour or so he saw me, a burning current entered my body. Previous to this, when sitting under a tamarind tree, something entered into me which I could not then explain. Years later, it was found that the mind had entered inside. Then I felt something else entering my body, which was very pleasing.

I was all along a dyspeptic and could neither digest food nor sleep properly. I was worrying, and the Swami asked me about it. I told him about my health. Once a lady devotee brought in cakes and food for a feast. I was living on *kanji* (gruel). Many had invited me but I always declined, saying, 'I cannot digest'. But the Swami pressed me, and so I had a good feast of very hard and rich food. That night it was so very strange, I slept profoundly. This was a great impetus to me to rely on the Swami more fully. My people, who were averse to my going to him, began to send my food to be eaten in his presence, as I was getting cured.

The mere look of the Swami stirred the soul. I have heard people being blessed by the guru holding his palm on the head of the disciple; but his look is more powerful. The Swami's instruction is: Do not forget the Self; all misery is due to forgetting the Self.

I was transferred to Berhampur in Orissa. Once many sores came on my feet and did not respond to any treatment. One morning two visitors came from Tiruvannamalai. They said they were on a pilgrimage to the North and that Bhagavan had specially asked them to look me up. Seeing my predicament they prescribed some simple home remedies which effected a miraculous cure. Surely they were the messengers of the compassionate Bhagavan. Spontaneously, I composed a song in his praise – *Saranagati* – 'My Refuge'.

95

N.N. Rajan (N.Nataraja Iyer) (1906-94), Station Master at Tiruvannamalai Railway Station, came under Sri Ramana's influence in 1935. He authored *Sri Ramana Dhyanam* and *The Bloom of Inner Glory*.

Being a householder, I felt that it was not right for me to follow a spiritual path alone, so I began taking my wife and children also to the Ashram.Within a few months, I found to my astonishment, quite a

conspicuous change in my wife and noticed that she had outstripped me in her understanding of Bhagavan. She had become a greater devotee and was imbibing more peace from him. My children also enjoyed his presence. Bhagavan had a special fondness for children and often used to joke with them and touch or caress them, though he scrupulously avoided touching adults or being touched by them. The children themselves derived a certain peace and joy from his presence and would sometimes sit motionless before him, as though under a spell, free from childish wrigglings.

I am not exaggerating when I say this. Once my daughter, who was only just over two, sat quietly by herself in a corner of the hall for about two hours, sitting cross-legged like adults and not even speaking. My wife and I did not notice this as we were absorbed in meditation, but the Maharshi did. When I went to the Ashram early next morning, I was surprised and delighted to hear the Maharshi telling one of the devotees, "Rajan's little daughter Kutti was sitting cross-legged away from her parents for about two hours and she never stirred the whole time."

It was delightful to hear him talk about the incident and to realize how closely he had watched her while we knew nothing about it. Of course, it was due to his Grace; a child would otherwise never act like that. He was omnipotent but was extremely unostentatious. He would never reveal his powers openly and behaved quite simply like an ordinary man.

***The following is from Rajan's interview as recorded in the video* Guru Ramana:**

Bhagavan is the Supreme Being in flesh and blood, perfection to the core. They say an *avatar*, but he is not an *avatar*, just above that state. He is Supreme Being personified. Face to face he sat among us; we slept with him, took food with him and sat at his feet for years together.

We hear about *rishis* in the annals of history, but we do not hear anything about such a great sage. He is the greatest sage of our time. In the Vedic age also there were *rishis* but they had their own impulses: they got anger, they got lust. Can we say any such thing about Bhagavan? No.

As Major Chadwick [No. 42] said, "If at all there is anybody fit to express the greatness of Bhagavan, it is Bhagavan himself." Will Bhagavan ever do that? That is the greatness of Bhagavan. His bewitching smile, his beaming forehead, his glittering radiant eyes, his sweet voice and measured words and his majestic form are unmatchable.

The following is from Rajan's diary dated November 6, 1943:

After a brief discussion between Major Chadwick and Bhagavan on the necessity of periodic action to ensure that the body remains healthy, there was a ten-minute silence. Then a devotee asked, "It is stated that one should dive into oneself with a keen one-pointed mind controlling speech and breath. Is it necessary to control the breath also?" Bhagavan replied, "If all thoughts are controlled, automatically the breath is also controlled. By intense and sustained practice it will become habitual. Controlling the breath through various yogic exercises is like putting brakes to the train when the engine is working. But by watching the source of the mind with full concentration, the thoughts would get controlled. This method will be more effective and easy. It is like shutting the power of the engine and thereby stopping the train completely."

96

His Highness Rama Varma Appan Tampuran, B.A., was Maharaja of Cochin (Kerala). He came to Sri Ramana in the 1930s, when he was not the Maharaja. The visit had a profound effect on him. The following is from his introduction to the Malayalam biography of Sri Ramana by Appunni.

There is no limit to the surging rise or to the subsiding tranquility of the mind. Nor is there any limit to its powers to chastise or control and to confer a blessing. The mind is indeed the cause of both happiness and misery, of enjoyment and of liberation. If it is recognised that *samsara* is nothing but a work of the mind, then the mystery of the cycle of births and deaths will be revealed.

The search for the mind has to be made within oneself. Self-knowledge can never be achieved and realised through scholarship. The path to Self-realisation is not easily accessible and it is extremely difficult to tread. For this, faith and devotion and an ardent aspiration for liberation are essential.

Self-realization dawned all at once for the Maharshi. The light of the Self shone forth suddenly like the flash of lightning. The Supreme Lord of the universe lifted him with His sacred hand and established him at the very centre and source of Being, Awareness and Bliss. It is perhaps on account of this we find in much of the teachings of the Maharshi, ultimate knowledge revealed rather than the path leading to it, giving preeminence to the end rather than to means.

The sorrows of the distressed, the doubts of earnest seekers, the disbelief of the sceptics who come to test him, and the pride of the high and mighty, verily perish in the mere presence of the Maharshi. His sacred abode confers peace and even induces spiritual trance which yields the Bliss of Self-realisation.

The praise of the Maharshi like that of Sri Krishna is delightful and beneficient alike to the worldly-minded sunk in the whirlpool of egoistic attachment and wallowing in the ditch of blind infatuation, as well as to those who seek liberation. It is indeed our good fortune to live during the lifetime of such a distinguished and great Sage. Blessed are the devotees who spend their time in his presence.

The life of the Maharshi is not the biography of an individual but radiance of the universal self; not the expression of body's acts but manifestation of the Spirit within.

97

Swami Rajeswarananda, born in Madras, got his name as a *sannyasi* of the Ramakrishna Order. He edited *The Call Divine* during its first twelve years. He authored *Erase the Ego* and *Teachings.*

Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi was the personification of emancipation, the source of supreme peace, and the boundless ocean of freedom. His solemn presence lifted us beyond our body and mind to our true Self. The truth of Self-realization, in his holy presence, was as if coursing through our veins, pulsating in our bosom, tingling with every drop of blood and becoming consonant with our very heartbeats. His words make us even today rest on the Glory of our Self, the infinite, the eternal and the deathless. His silent and sacred look imparted Self-knowledge that became a part and parcel of our constitution and the very vitality of our life. **Sri Ramana was the wonder of the world with the perfume of spiritual peace. His life is a study in divine illumination based on the dynamic silence. All worries and wounds of the world simply melted in his presence like ice before fire.**

No school of philosophy, cult, creed, yoga and the like could claim Sri Ramana, as he did not fit easily into any ready-made classification. He lived free and remained free and let every one remain free likewise.

A sage, a philosopher, a recluse, an incarnation of God – all these terms do not adequately describe him. All these fall flat since he transcends them. He was unique in remaining true to himself and being himself. He was in himself the quest and the find.

He set before us, as the glory and goal of life, the realization of the full divine consciousness of our Self. He proclaimed the Absolute as the Self, 'I Am' in each individual life. He was himself a testimony for such an august revelation that always stands at the very doorstep of one and all. His was the cure-all that could restore the human race to its lost heritage and happiness.

Sri Ramana kindles in every one of us an awareness of the spiritual glory within. Bhagavan's gospel is a practical expression of Self, the Reality, Intelligence and Bliss.

Sri Ramana stands for the unity of existence, the non-duality of the Godhead and the harmony of religions. His teachings are refreshingly plain and powerful. They throw open the floodgates of the soul and make the living waters of the highest consciousness rush forth. His gospel, free from any dogma or doctrine, is not hampered by the fossilised traditions. It is as broad as the sky, as deep as the sea, and as universal as the rays of the sun. He awakens in every one of us the dormant Divinity.

His very life was a practical demonstration of the reality of *Brahman*, the Supreme Self. His gospel reveals clearly the divinity of the soul, the oneness of humanity and the indivisibility of the Godhead, not as articles of belief or opinion, cult or creed, dogmas or doctrines but as the truths of his own experience.

Even a single word from Bhagavan's holy lips was enough to enable us to carry it all through our life, to stir the soul, and awaken it to its intrinsic immortality and infinity.

98

Dr. Lt. Col. P. V. Karamchandani was District Medical Officer of North Arcot District.Tiruvannamalai fell within his jurisdiction.

One night, in February 1949 at Vellore, I could not sleep and kept tossing in bed. That was something very unusual. At one a.m. a telephone call came from Tiruvannamalai, a place 55 miles away, asking me to reach there by 8 a.m. as Sri Ramana was very ill. Having received the call, I fell

sound asleep. I reached Tiruvannamalai without any emotion.My only thought was that I was on a professional mission of attending on a patient. The sainthood of Sri Ramana had no significance for me.

I conducted my examination in a strictly professional manner. I carried no spiritual feelings for him. Nor did he speak a word with me. But he had directed a momentary gaze of grace at me, which kept stirring me deeply. Involuntarily I felt a new vista of spiritual consciousness open out before me.

That wondrous gaze of Sri Ramana seemed to envelop me with an aura of bliss. I felt the spiritual pull from him so irresistible that after a few days I myself arranged a visit to Tiruvannamalai just for the sake of having his *darshan*. I took my wife with me.

We visited Sri Ramana with a sense of curiosity and an indefinable sense of expectation. We made our obeisance and sat by his feet. We did not speak a word; nor did he. No speech seemed necessary. **So surcharged with spirituality was he that his spirituality wafted out to us, completely enveloping us. Serenity seeped into us. Our minds attained a state of blissful, ecstatic meditation.**

The tumour that Sri Ramana was bearing must have given him the most excruciating, nerve-wrecking pain. Such writhing pain would make the toughest man wince and moan. But his godly face did not bear the slightest sign of his agony. It reflected only joy and peace. He seemed to have switched off his mind from the body to the divine.

The next occasion when I was summoned, Sri Ramana had developed anuria. [Failure of the kidney to produce urine.] I went to his Ashram not with the all-important feeling of a District Medical Officer. I went in the spirit of a humble devotee to serve **a saint of colossal spiritual magnitude.** My job as a doctor was to be coupled with the devotion of a disciple. I was told that for the previous 24 hours he had not taken any food, not even a drop of water and all earnest requests and persuations had failed. I was requested to persuade him to eat something.

On examination I found that it was imperative that Bhagavan should take some fluid. Ordering him in my capacity as a doctor was out of question. I felt like asking him as a boon to accept my prayer. I prayed inwardly and held a glass of buttermilk before him. He gazed at me for a second, took the buttermilk in shaking hands and drank it. My joy knew no bounds. There was relief and jubilation all around. I was thanked profusely. But I felt infinitely grateful for Bhagavan's overwhelming grace. He had heard my silent prayer and granted my boon. **Wonderful was the spiritual exhilaration which I experienced in his holy presence.**

I was called again at midnight. As I entered his room, four disciples were there. Bhagavan wanted them to leave the room. After they left, I was alone with Bhagavan. As usual, he did not speak with me. I was also silent. **But the vibrations that emanated from him were celestial.** His body must have been in terrific, mortal pain. But his heavenly spirituality was unaffected by it. A rapturous thrill electrified my entire being.

I had an intense desire to worship this illumined soul. I had learnt that Bhagavan did not allow devotees to touch his feet. But I felt a deep urge not only to touch his blessed feet but also to press them lovingly. I took courage in both my hands and pressed them. The wonder of wonders! He let me do so! His grace was abounding. I considered myself in the seventh heaven. I glorify those few minutes of my life.

Next time I was summoned was about three hours after midnight. Pain must have been torturing his body. Still, he was sound asleep. Holy silence filled the room. It was the ambrosial hour of the dawn. I did not wish to disturb him. I sat quietly by his feet. Suddenly he opened his eyes. His gracious gaze fell on me. He softly muttered 'D.M.O.'The peculiar tone in which he mentioned me indicated that I had been in his sacred thoughts and that he was expecting me. I felt myself blessed. I silently worshipped him. My whole being seemed to vibrate with ecstasy.

At that time I had been feeling restless about promotion as Surgeon-General, being the senior-most I.M.S. officer in the Province of Madras. However I tried to banish the idea of that coveted promotion from my mind and said to myself, "Why am I fretting unnecessarily? The next time I visit Bhagavan, I shall request him to grant me promotion!"

On my next visit, I went before him with my mind resolutely set on requesting him for that boon. But a marvel happened. As soon as I saw him, my mind melted, the resolution evaporated, and I felt filled with strange contentment. A request did formulate itself within me, but it was an entirely different request. I inwardly prayed, 'Bhagavan, free me from my craving for this promotion. I don't want anything mundane. Instead, grant me my soul's evolution.' My prayer seemed to be instantly granted. Effulgent joy flooded the very depths of my being. I reverently bowed before him and he gazed at me benevolently.

My last visit was on the day Bhagavan attained *nirvana*. On visiting him I found that his body would not last beyond that day. I silently prayed that he might retain his body till I brought my wife from Vellore who wanted to witness how a great saint discards his body.

Now the finale – how my wife brought orange juice for the Maharshi, how he would not accept any drink at all to avoid going to the bathroom; how I devoutedly prayed that he may drink the juice to save my wife from deep disappointment; how he accepted my unspoken prayer and asked for the juice to the transcendental delight of my wife and myself; and how, shortly afterwards, in utter tranquility, he passed on.

During my two months' contact with Bhagavan, I did not speak a single word with him. But, what wonderful grace he poured into me through his benign, benevolent gaze! A peerless spiritual experience indeed.

99

Dr. T. N. Krishnaswami was a prolific photographer of Sri Ramana. Dozens of his shots are reproduced in *Radiance of the Self*, Sri Ramana's picture album, published by the Bangalore Centre.

When I was studying medicine at Madras, together with a few friends I set out on an excursion to Vellore with my camera. Someone suggested that the temple at Tiruvannamalai was a huge and impressive work of art, so we went there and admired the beautiful stone carvings and the huge towers.

We also paid a visit to Ramana Maharshi who was living a couple of miles away. When we arrived at the Ashram, the Maharshi had gone out for a walk on the hill. We waited and saw a string of people following a tall man walking with a stick and holding a *kamandalu*.When the tall stately figure approached us and asked what the matter was, he was told that the party from Madras wanted to take some pictures of Bhagavan. "Oh! Is that so?" said the Maharshi. "Let them," so saying he stood posing for me with his hands on his hips and with his face in semi-profile. I lost no time. I opened my camera and clicked. I was not looking for any spiritual face and was not conscious of any holy atmosphere.

Bhagavan, as they called him, entered the hall and lowered himself on the sofa which was carefully arranged for him. We also entered the hall and sat a few feet away, in front of him. The Maharshi did not seem to take notice of anything around him. He wore a calm and distant look. His eyes were shining and there was something divine about his countenance.

The hall was badly lit for photography but still I took a few pictures

of the Maharshi. We then got up and mechanically prostrated before him and left the hall. I returned to Madras, developed the films and sent a few prints to the Ashram, as desired by them.

I settled down to my studies and had almost forgotten Tiruvannamalai. One morning I received a letter inviting me to come and take a group photo with the Maharshi, as the devotees were impressed with the good pictures that I had made. I wondered if this could not be put off till my examinations were over. But somehow I found myself on train to Tiruvannamalai.

When I entered the Maharshi's presence, he greeted me with a smile and said, "They want a group photo and they want you to take it for them." I was highly flattered. To have been the object of the Maharshi's remark was exquisitely pleasing. I arranged the group, erected my camera and took a few pictures. Then Bhagavan posed for me in the conventional *padmasana.* He sat almost statue-like, with a clean-shaven head.

Whenever I went to the Ashram, though I usually stayed only from morning till evening, I made it a point to accompany the Maharshi and take as many pictures of him as possible. In the few hours I spent with the Maharshi, I felt charged with an inexplicable peace and contentment and I always returned home elated. My short walks with him gave me the rare opportunity of listening and taking part in the conversations.

Once a devotee who had strong faith in the Maharshi brought the corpse of her only child right into the hall. Crying and lamenting she said, "My son is dead. I pray and beseech you to grant him life."The Maharshi sat silent for a while, as was his custom, and then gently said, "Please remove the body to a nearby cottage and let us see what happens in the morning."

Nothing happened and the boy lay dead. But something happened to the minds of the relatives and they removed the corpse and cremated it, realizing that they should not expect the dead to rise. The Maharshi later remarked: "Even an incarnate God cannot raise all the dead. He has no individual will so he cannot decide to perform a miracle. If miracles happened in his ambience, he witnessed them; that was all."

One day, as we were going up the hill, the Maharshi picked up a small glistening pebble from the path and held it out to me saying, "Someone from abroad has written asking for a stone taken from a holy part of this hill. He does not know that the whole hill is holy. This hill is Siva Himself. As we identify ourselves with the body, so Siva has chosen to identify Himself with this hill. The seeker will obtain guidance and solace by staying

near this hill." These words sank into my heart. It never occurred to me to weigh or examine the aptness of what was said. The hill was holy. The Maharshi had said it and that was what counted with me.

So long as I was meeting the Maharshi, I felt drawn and attracted to him. It gave me immense pleasure to take pictures of him. He was more important to me than his teachings – every little movement, every one of his acts and gestures, was highly gratifying. I was attracted to him like a baby to its mother.

His *mahanirvana* gave me a severe jolt. I was shocked. I had done nothing in the direction of spiritual *sadhana.* Had I wasted all my time taking photographs, while I should have engaged myself in trying to understand and practise his teachings in his very presence? 'No', I said to myself, 'this cannot be true.'I was sure that I had obtained some grace from the Maharshi. He was somehow still here. Only, we have to learn to feel his presence. We would never be forsaken for he had himself assured us that he was not going away.

100

R. Narayana Iyer did personal service to Sri Ramana. He wrote a number of articles in *The Mountain Path* under the pen name Vishnu. When he first went to Sri Ramana as a young man, he was a modernist and a freethinker.

In 1929, when employed as Sub-Registrar at Chetput, a town 30 miles from Tiruvannamalai, I was an out-and-out skeptic with no religion in me, scoffing in my references to *sadhus, sannyasis* and *swamis,* whom I considered impostors and parasites on society, who exploited the credulous folk for personal ends.

My only friend and constant companion was Dr. Ramakrishna Iyer, son of Lakshmi Ammal, a friend and playmate of Sri Bhagavan in his boyhood days at Tiruchuzhi.[1] He was well acquainted with Bhagavan and an occasional visitor to the Ashram. He once asked me to accompany him to Tiruvannamalai during the festival of *Karthikai Deepam.*[2]

The pomp and pageantry of the temple festival had no attraction for me, yet I agreed, not wishing to hurt my friend's feelings. However, I requested him to let me stay with my parents, who had gone for the festival and were staying in the town. He agreed. But on seeing the number of

persons huddled in a small house in the town, I consented to stay at the Ashram, which was less crowded. On the way, I repeated my opinion about the so-called holy men and said to Dr. Iyer, "I will not come in or join in any of your 'foolish acts'. If by chance I meet your *Swami,* I will not prostrate before him. I mean no insult but I cannot do what is against my conviction."

We walked in. A man in a white loincloth, a towel suspended on his shoulder, a *kamandalu* in one hand and a walking stick in another, stopped in his walk on seeing us. My friend hastened his steps and I slowly followed. He was greeted very kindly and was asked about the welfare of his mother and brother. Out of courtesy I looked at the Maharshi.What a wonderful face and what a welcoming smile; bewitching, fascinating and a powerful look too!

In a moment I was at his feet on the gravel ground! I soon regained my self-possession and felt ashamed. With a pleasing smile he said, "You have a couple of days' leave, is it not so? You can stay in the Ashramam." I dared not say anything. I was dazed. Soon I recovered and wanted to find out if he had written any books. I got a copy of *Reality in Forty Verses* in Tamil. I tried to read the first stanza. I could not follow. The words seemed too closely packed and somehow jumbled together to form a stanza. I was flabbergasted. "What", thought I, "can he not say what he has to say in some intelligible language?" Someone nearby said that it had been arranged that the Maharshi himself would explain to us the *Forty Verses* that night.

At night, the Maharshi sat on a dais inside a shed containing his mother's *samadhi*. About half a dozen of us were seated on the ground before him. A solemn stillness pervaded the air. There was absolute silence. Maharshi read the first stanza. The mere reading of the stanza made the meaning as simple as simplicity itself ! Stanza by stanza he read and explained in a voice that was so sweet and melodious and coming as though from 'somewhere'. The climax came. Explaining one verse he said, "God cannot be seen with our eyes or known by our sense perceptions. This is what is meant by the saying: To see God is to become God." A stalwart person with a severe expression named Dandapani Swami, interposed:"Is Bhagavan saying this out of personal experience?"

The question asked bluntly with such naivete was answered with equal candour: "Else would I dare to say so?" What takes so much time to think flashed upon me in a moment. God cannot be known by our sense faculties. The only way was to become God. If God were to appear before

one in flesh and blood here He is. My body experienced a thrill from somewhere deep down in me. Again and again, thrill after thrill quivered and shook my frame. I went out to compose myself.

Well, I seemed caught in a net! The more I was with him; the more I wanted to be with him. But I was shortly transferred to Arni, another town within the same radius of thirty miles. Here I missed the company of the doctor friend. Losing all delight in all other things, I turned the monthly visits to the Ashram to weekly ones, coupling Sundays with other holidays. And I was always welcome at the Ashram.

Sri Bhagavan had his head shaved once a month on the full moon day. Natesan was the barber who used to do this service. Bhagavan sat on a stool and Natesan would stand and shave him. Once Sri Bhagavan suggested to Natesan in all seriousness that it would be more comfortable for the barber to sit on the stool while he himself would sit on the floor!

I used to translate from Tamil to English Bhagavan's replies to letters received by him. I had made friends with the attendants, Madhavaswami, Satyanandaswami, Krishnaswami, Rangaswami and others. They did not protest when I gradually introduced personal services to Sri Bhagavan, such as massaging his legs, fomentations, etc.

There were occasions when his muscles became rigid or painful. After his work like cutting vegetables and directing the task of the kitchen workers in the early hours of the morning, he would be on his couch in the hall sitting there or just reclining like a statue cut in alabaster or like one posing for a painter or sculptor. Sitting in this manner all day made his muscles hard and inflexible and so he required some massage. Thus, by slow degrees a sort of familiarity and intimacy grew up between Bhagavan and me.

Once I asked, "Bhagavan, you left your home in Madurai where your relatives had been treating you with love and kindness and spending money upon your education. You misappropriated their money for your train fare to Tiruvannamalai. You sneaked your way to the railway station so as not to be noticed by anyone. You posed yourself as a pilgrim who had lost his kit. Was all this straightforward and proper?" He was silent for a while and then replied, "This can be explained. It is said in the Kural[3] that even falsehood is akin to truth when it is unblemished good and harms none."

I once told Bhagavan, "I have been here for many years. People meditate and get into *samadhi*. I close my eyes for a minute and the mind travels round the world ten times and so many long forgotten things come up." Upon this he said, "Why do you concern yourself about others? They

may meditate or sleep and snore. Look to yourself. Whenever the mind goes astray bring it back to the quest."

Once a few very learned Sanskrit scholars were seated in the hall discussing portions of the Upanishads and other scriptural texts with Bhagavan. I felt in my heart, how great these people are and how fortunate they are to be so learned and to have such deep understanding and ability to discuss with our Bhagavan. I felt miserable. After the pandits had taken leave, Bhagavan turned to me and said, "What?" looking into my eyes and studying my thoughts, "This is only the husk ! All this book learning and capacity to repeat the scriptures by memory is absolutely of no use. To know the Truth, you need not undergo all this torture of learning. Not by reading do you get the Truth. **Be Quiet** that is Truth. **Be Still,** that is God."

Then very graciously he turned to me again, and there was an immediate change in his tone and attitude. He asked, "Do you shave yourself?" Bewildered by this sudden change, I answered trembling that I did. "Ah", he said, "For shaving you use a mirror, don't you? You look into the mirror and then shave your face; you don't shave the image in the mirror. Similarly, all the scriptures are meant only to show you the way of Realization. They are meant for practice and attainment. Mere book learning and discussions are comparable to a man shaving the image in the mirror." From that day onwards my long-standing sense of inferiority vanished once for all.

Once I cried and told the Maharshi that I knew nothing about Vedanta nor could I practise austerity, being a householder. I prayed to him to help me by showing the Reality or the way to it. I also frankly told him that his method of Self-enquiry was too hard for me. He then graciously said, "You know *Ulladu Narpadu* [Truth in Forty Verses]. It imparts Pure Truth, deals with it and explains it. Go on reading it verse by verse. The words of the verses will in course of time vanish and Pure Truth *(sat)* alone will shine, like the snake relinquishing its skin and coming out shining."

One day I felt puzzled by the teaching that everything in the world is *maya* or illusion. I asked Bhagavan how with the physical existence before our eyes we can all be unreal and non-existent? Bhagavan laughed and asked me whether I had any dream the previous night. I replied that I saw several people lying asleep. He said, "Suppose now I ask you to go and wake up all those people in the dream and tell them they are not real, how absurd would it be! That is how it is to me. There is nothing but the dreamer, so where does the question of dream people, real or unreal, arise; still more of waking them up and telling them that they are not real. We are

all unreal, why do you doubt it? **That** alone is real." After this explanation I never had any doubt about the unreality of the objective world.

About the *jivanmukta,* Bhagavan said, "The *jivanmukta* is one without any thoughts or *sankalpas*. The thought process ceases completely in him. Some Power makes him do things. So he is not the doer but the one who is made to do."

Bhagavan's compassion has graced my life many times – On the day my wife died, it rained in torrents. I was afraid that the cremation would be delayed. Bhagavan sent some Ashram workers to help me. When Bhagavan was told that the rain was too heavy for the funeral, he said, "Go on with it, never mind the rain." When the body was taken to the cremation ground, the rain stopped, and after the body was burnt to white ashes, it started raining again. In 1942, I wanted to get my daughter married. I had a suitable boy in mind but he raised some objections. Anxiously, I showed his letter to Bhagavan, who said, "Don't worry, it will come off." Soon afterwards the boy himself came and the marriage was celebrated.

. It is our greatest fortune that the Supreme Consciousness appearing in the garb of a human body graciously undertook to come down to our level of understanding and bore the tremendous task of imparting to us the *atma vidya*.**The contact and impact that I have had with Bhagavan have been such as to make me feel that knowingly or unknowingly I must have done something in the course of my lives to deserve this unique blessing.**

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1. Birthplace of Sri Ramana.
2. *Refer* annexure – II, p. 411.
3. An ancient Tamil classic.

101

Suddhananda Bharati was a patriot who worked in the field of Tamil literature, journalism and social reconstruction, during the 1920s and 30s. His *Ramana Vijayam* (1931) is Sri Ramana's first biography in Tamil. His *Arul Aruvi* (Torrents of Grace) contains songs dedicated to Sri Ramana.

My last political speech was delivered in Tuticorin under the presidency of the heroic Chidambaram Pillai. As I was addressing the

mammoth meeting in the Vattakinar Maidan, tears flowed from my eyes. My subject was politics and I was speaking religion: "The spiritual India is already free. The material India shall be free through spiritual force. Start mass prayers and meditations. Purify and electrify your souls by yoga. Send out waves of good and great thoughts. Send out the message of the Upanishads. The waves shall transform the thoughts of humanity. The Silent Force of a Silent Sage is working behind the destiny of India."

I felt this and had a vision of this clearly. I came down the platform and closed myself in meditation for a day. The vision was confirmed. The need of the hour, I wrote to Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni [No. 91] was "Yoga and silent development of power."

By then I had the *darshan* of Maharshi Ramana. I hurried to him finishing my political sojourn. I reached Sri Ramanasramam and entered the small room adjoining the Mother's shrine. Ganapati Muni stood up exclaiming, "Welcome, Welcome." Ramana's gentle voice said, "Let Bharati come in." I saw no human form. I felt dazed. Effulgence enveloped me. My mind disappeared into silence. I sat down, closed my eyes and entered the inner cave of my heart. An hour passed like five minutes. I came back to myself, opened my eyes and saw Ramana's lotus eyes riveted on mine. He appeared like a *linga* spreading rays of burnished gold. After all these years of *sadhana*, here I experienced a delightful inner reality which was beyond words and thought. I caught hold of the Master's feet and shed tears of delight singing with Saint Manickavachakar[1], who sang: "Today Thou hast risen in my heart like the Sun destroying darkness." The Muni congratulated me saying, "Like myself, you have found the right guru in the right place!"

***B. V. Narasimha Swami writes in his book* Self Realization:**

Contact with the Maharshi made Bharati feel more introverted; his egotism sank so low that he began to refer to himself in the third person. In this way he spent six months (in 1929) at Tiruvannamalai. Later he wrote a brilliant piece of poetic prose *Ramana Vijayam*, every line of which breathes intense devotion to the Maharshi.

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1. A great Tamil poet of 9th century.

102

Ramanapadananda, born as V.S.Kuppuswami Aiyengar, came to Sri Ramana in 1928, after many years in business.

I was a broker and my business took me all over India. Once, when I was in Kashmir, I came to hear of Sri Bhagavan and his greatness. So, soon after my return to Madras, I went to Tiruvannamalai and proceeded to the Ashram. When I saw Sri Bhagavan he was sitting on a bench inside a room thatched with coconut leaves put up over his mother's *samadhi*. This was in January 1928 when the Ashram consisted practically of this structure alone and nothing else.The moment I saw him I was overcome by an inexplicable feeling of joy and devotion. I burst into tears immediately and could not stop them for a long time. I had had a chequered career and I had no peace of mind. But in Sri Bhagavan's presence I experienced complete peace of mind. I also experienced an extraordinary bliss.

Although I had to return to Madras, my heart was with Sri Bhagavan. So I visited him again in 1930 and was blessed by him with a smile and a piercing look. This time also I was overcome by an uncontrollable flow of tears of joy. The same thing happened when I visited the house at Tiruchuzhi in which Sri Bhagavan was born.

In 1930, I proceeded to north India on a sudden impulse. I went to Varanasi, Haridwar, Rishikesh and Badarinath. At Badarinath I met Swami Tapovanam [No.82] who was impressed by my devotion to Sri Bhagavan so much that he composed a *sloka* in Sanskrit in which he invoked "Sri Bhagavan's blessings on Ramanapadananda who sheds copious tears at the very mention of the name." At Varanasi I was advised to wear the robes of *sannyasins,* as a means of obtaining alms easily. I continued to wear them. But once when I came before Sri Bhagavan in them, he burst out laughing and said, "Giving up the ego is the real *sannyasa,* not the wearing of ochre robes." At once I discarded them and have since then worn only white.

Having been convinced that Sri Bhagavan was the substratum of the universe and the most glorious *avatar* that has been witnessed till now, I felt that it was my duty to make his greatness known everywhere. With this object in view, I resigned my post in the well-known firm of 'Bombay Company' at Madurai. I next proceeded to celebrate Ramana *Jayanti* (Bhagavan's birthday) at various places with *puja*, music, discourses,

processions, etc. I even proceeded to Ceylon, Burma and Malaysia and celebrated Ramana *Jayanti* or Ramana *Mela* or installed Sri Ramana's portraits at all the places I visited.

Once I met Sri Bhagavan on his way up the hill and prostrated myself before him and said, "I have now had Sri Bhagavan's *darshan,* I can go." Upon this he smiled and said, "Whose *darshan* to whom? Why don't you say that I had your *darshan?*

It is Sri Bhagavan's grace which finally brought me to the Ashram to spend my last days near him.

103

Col. A.N.S. Murthi's mother's hometown was Tiruvannamalai. He met Sri Ramana as a young boy.

Whenever I stayed with my mother in her hometown Tiruvannamalai, I used to climb up the sacred hill and go to the Virupaksha Cave where Sri Ramana was staying. My mother used to say that this Brahmana Swami, as he was then called, was unique in that he had attained Self-realisation when he was a teenaged boy. He had by then become quite famous in the town.

On one occasion, the Swami was speaking about monkeys sitting very near him as though they were human beings. He would refer to one as the 'leader' and eulogise his qualities of head and heart while the monkey would grin and make faces at us as though he was not pleased with our manner of receiving the Swami's remarks. It was amazing to see the Swami offer food in his hand and the grimacing monkey come and take it from his hand as from a parent's. How well behaved they were with him! Although the next moment they hopped off and went away bouncing over the rocks for their usual, wild, carefree life!

I saw the Swami again on the hill, while studying at college. One day, I took a train from Vellore and went to him.The Swami's golden skin seemed to shine more than ever before, and I could feel his benign eyes cool and soothe my body which had become hot in the midday summer sun as I climbed up to his abode. After partaking of the fruit he gave and prostrating for his blessings, I went back to my college, and soon forgot all about him perhaps in the flush of success and in the attractions of the metropolis, Madras, where I was studying.

It was many years before I saw him again.Though I had read some of his Tamil works and newspaper articles about him, I had also read works by Charles Bradlaugh and others on atheism, besides quite a few articles on *sadhus* being the curse of our country, etc. Therefore, when I went to him for his blessings I was not without a critical mind. And so when I saw him from a distance reclining on a sofa, I, with my ideas of asceticism, at once revolted. I did not prostrate before him, nor did I go to sit near him. I sat afar challenging him mentally to call me if he cared to remember me or if he could read my mind. He did not, except for looking at me for a second with the almost fearfully blank but piercing eyes of a stranger. I hurriedly left the Ashram.

The temple he was said to be constructing to perpetuate his mother's memory, the cheques he was said to be signing,[1] the beating he once received from dacoits and many other things I heard from the crowd and from the town mayor, with whom I stayed, added to my doubts and I gave him up.

One day when I went to draw some books from a library in Bangalore, a youngster working there, perhaps to express his admiration for my lectures which I gave occasionally on various subjects, quickly drew from one of the shelves *The Teachings of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi* by Arthur Osborne [No.40] and requested me to read it. On seeing the title, I almost threw it back, but somehow within a split second I decided not to. I took it home, where it lay among many other books for quite some time. And then one evening, when I had the leisure, I opened it and, to my own amazement, thereafter I carried it about with me and read it with avidity and reverence like the *Gita.*

I found page after page a source of revelation and comfort. I found answers to all my queries and doubts, not only about life in general but also about the lives of saints I knew, and particularly about Brahmana Swami of my boyhood days, who later became known as Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, but to whom I had become blind till Arthur Osborne opened my eyes.

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1. How misinformed the writer was at that time to believe that Sri Ramana was signing cheques.In fact, after leaving Madurai, Sri Ramana never put his signature anywhere as he felt that he had no individual identity of his own. Even on the will he executed in 1938, he drew a small line and made four cross marks as a token of his signature before the sub-registrar, who had come to the Ashram for registration of the will.

104

V. Kameswara Rao, a government employee, met Sri Ramana in the late 1940s, after revelation in a dream.

Once I had a dream in which a saintly old man with a radiant smile beckoned me to him. I told my wife about my dream, but could not identify the saint I had seen. Could it be Ramana Maharshi, about whom I had read in the book *Self Realization?*[1] I asked a friend of mine, who often went to Sri Ramanasramam, whether he would take me with him and he agreed. We set off that very day, arriving at the Ashram next morning.

We went to the hall and there on a couch sat the Maharshi, the saint of my dream. I felt that I was in the presence of God. I fell prostrate before Bhagavan (for this was the name my friend used in addressing him). A group of men and women were seated silently on the floor on either side of him. Close to him sat an elderly bearded man binding a small book.

Bhagavan asked me whether I had had my coffee. So I went out, had my bath and breakfast.When I got back I found that Bhagavan himself was stitching the book. I wondered why he should do it, and then I noticed how carefully he worked at it and showed the bearded man how to do it.

As a government servant I had to pass an examination in a second language within a prescribed period. I decided to take it in Tamil, although I knew very little of the language. I was a bit worried about it and wanted Bhagavan's blessings for my success.When I told my problem to Bhagavan, he replied *'parava illai'* (don't worry), which made me feel very happy. He advised me to take the little book *Nan Yar?* (Who am I?) and read it with the help of a Tamil tutor.

Next morning, I went and prostrated before Bhagavan and asked his permission to leave. He gave it but asked why I was in such a hurry. My friend expressed a doubt whether I would be able to go that day, in view of what Bhagavan had said; but I had to get back. I bought the books from the Ashram bookstall and went to the station to find a two-day strike on the railway. When we went back and told Bhagavan about it, he smiled.

Two days later when I asked for leave to go, he said, 'Very well'. This time we walked to the station and a cart followed us with our baggage. When we arrived, the train was already in but the cart was not yet in sight, so I thought I would miss the train. I went to the stationmaster and

told him that this was my second attempt to leave the Ashram and asked him to detain the train for a few minutes till my baggage arrived; he agreed.

When I got home, I engaged a tutor and stayed at home during the summer recess of the law courts, for reading *Who am I*? in Tamil. The written test came along. I had to translate an English speech into Tamil. I cleared the test without much difficulty.Then there was the more frightening oral test in Madras, but it also was made very easy and I passed that too.

In February 1949, my eldest son had a severe attack of smallpox. After a few days the doctor warned me that many people were dying of it and the chances of recovery were slight. I sat at the boy's bedside reading religious poems so as to keep his mind on God, since he was not expected to live. Then, the idea suddenly came to me to ask Bhagavan for his blessings. So I wrote to him: "I pray for your blessings on the suffering child and his parents."

Early next morning my sister, who had been taking her turn sitting by the boy during the night, told us that she had a vision of Ammavaru (the spirit of smallpox) leaving our house and asking her to take care of the boy. I also rece ived a letter from the Ashram stating, "*Prasadam* (sacred ash) is sent herewith with Sri Bhagavan's gracious blessings for your child laid up with pox." The letter thrilled me. But how did Bhagavan know that my son had smallpox? Anyway, my son survived and is in good health. My faith in Bhagavan increased enormously as a result of this, because it was a matter of life and death for my boy and Bhagavan gave him life.

In March, 1949 a big ceremony was held at the Ashram for the consecration of the temple over the *samadhi* of Bhagavan's mother. I decided to go and take my wife and my mother with me. A car was waiting at the door to take us to the station. Suddenly I felt that I should not go. My wife and mother naturally protested. Everyone was annoyed but I merely said, "Perhaps Bhagavan doesn't want me to see the function. I am sorry but I can't help it."

At about nine o'clock that evening I received a telegram that the only son of my sister was dangerously ill with meningitis, and that I should send my mother there at once. I put her on the train together with my sister. On arrival, the sister wrote me a frantic letter saying that the case of my nephew was hopeless and the only chance of saving him, if at all, was to invoke the blessings of Bhagavan. So, I again wrote to the Ashram.

In reply I received Sri Bhagavan's blessing for the child and his parents. My nephew recovered. We understood then why I suddenly had

to cancel my journey to Tiruvannamalai. If we had gone, the telegram would not have reached me, my mother and sister would not have gone in time, and I would not have written asking for Bhagavan's blessings. My erratic decision, prompted by something unknown to me, saved the child.

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1. First biography of Sri Ramana (1931) by B.V. Narasimha Swami.

105

Prof. V.B. Athavale of Kirloskarvadi (Maharashtra) was a *Gita* scholar. He wrote many articles for *The Call Divine*.

I had the good fortune of meeting Ramana Maharshi in April 1944, and observing for one week his state of Supreme Consciousness, where worldly knowledge appears insignificant.

I had prepared a genealogical chart of some 350 persons mentioned in the *Rig Veda*. I intended to show this chart to Ramana Maharshi and talk to him about my *Gita* study. But when I found that no one talked in the hall, I dropped the idea and settled not to talk about it unless the Maharshi showed his intention. Next day, when I entered the hall at 8 a.m., I was surprised to find that the Maharshi had asked one of his devotees to hand over a *Gita* book to me, which contained 746 verses instead of the normal 700, and to ask me what I had to say about the difference. Thus I got the chance of opening the *Gita* topic. To avoid the disturbance of peace in the hall, the Maharshi asked me to meet a pandit in the afternoon, and talk to him about the *Gita*, and that the pandit should tell the Maharshi about it later.

I talked to the pandit for four days. One day, the Maharshi saw my genealogical chart and asked me what I had to say about '*tenaiva rupena chatturbhujena*', the reference to the four hands of Krishna in the 11th chapter. I explained to thé pandit that Arjuna has addressed Krishna twice as 'Vishno' in the 11th chapter. In the 10th chapter we are told that Krishna was Vishnu out of Adityas. Though this expression is usually interpreted to mean the sun in the twelve signs of the Zodiac, it cannot be correct, because the next words say, "I am the sun among the stars." The *Rig Vedic* expression '*Astau putraso Aditeh*' says that Aditi had eight sons and *Adhyaryn Brahmana* says, '*Narayanaya vidmahe vasudevaya dhimahi, tanno Vishnuh prachodayat*'. It means that Vishnu was called Vasudeva

patronymically.Thus Krishna and Vishnu had the identical name Vasudeva patronymically.

The Maharshi was pleased when he heard the explanation and he gave me his blessings for the study and suggested that I should write a commentary on the *Gita*. On April 24, I informed the Maharshi that I was leaving in the evening and requested him to give me his autograph. Someone told me that the Maharshi never signs his name. I expressed regret for my ignorance of the rule and said that I wanted the handwriting of the Maharshi and not his signature.The Maharshi took a pen and a piece of paper and wrote a reply to a query raised by me mentally, thus fulfilling my desire to have his handwriting.

106

G.Lakshmi Narasimham, B.L., greatly helped the Ashram management through his services during the 1930s and 40s. He translated into Telugu *Five Hymns to Arunachala* and *Reality in Forty Verses*, works of Sri Ramana.

My contact with Bhagavan began in 1930, and I spent a continuous period of three years at Sri Ramanasramam. It was a great blessing.

I was a science graduate. I had learned about the atomic structure of the universe and how the matter finally resolves into energy, and that the mind also is a form of energy. So the entire world of the mind and the matter, when traced to its source, is one uniform Energy or God, or whatever you choose to call it.

This was the attitude of my mind when I first went to Sri Ramanasramam. Bhagavan was then translating his *Ulladu Narpadu* into Telugu. After completing it he gave the manuscript to me and said, "You are an Andhra: see if there are any grammatical mistakes in it." It was this translation which made my mind turn inwards and set it on the right path.

The essence of what Bhagavan said in my talks with him was: "You say that on final analysis all that I see or think or do is one; but that really comprises two notions: the all that is seen; and the 'I' that does the seeing, thinking and doing, and says 'I'.Which of these two is the more real, true and important? Obviously the seer, since the 'seen' is dependent on it. So, turn your attention to the seer who is the source of your 'I' and

realize it. This is the real task. Up till now you have been studying the object, not the subject. Now find out for what reality this 'I' stands. Find the entity which is the source of the expression 'I'. That is the Self, the Self of all selves."

This direct, simple teaching was like a tonic to me. It swept away the unrest and confusion that till then had haunted my mind. It is, of course, the essence of *Ulladu Narpadu* and the central theme of all Bhagavan's writings. The simplicity of it made me burst out, "Then Bhagavan, Self-realization is very easy, just as you say in the poem *Atma Vidya*!"

Bhagavan smiled and said, "Yes, yes, it seems so at first, but there is a difficulty. You have to overcome your present false values and wrong identification. The quest requires concentrated effort and steadfast abidance in the Source, when reached." However, while warning me, he also added words of solace: "But don't let that deter you. The rise of the urge to seek the 'I' is itself an act of Divine Grace, for which one has to pray."

Once my mother said to Bhagavan, "You are God, kindly help me." He replied, "I, a God – I am only a believer in God's existence. Don't say I am God. Then everyone will try to pick a hair of mine."

My three-year old son suffering from acute liver ailment was taken to the Ashram for a few days but died after two months. The incident was brought to Bhagavan's notice. When Bhagavan appeared in dream to a close relation, he asked Bhagavan: "The child died even though he was brought to you." Bhagavan replied, "So many clients come to the lawyer in your family. Does he not always say, "I will do my best."? Does he always win the case? So is the case with God also.

When a devotee failed in his attempt to get a suitable bridegroom for his daughter, he sought Bhagavan's help. He was given a Tamil verse for chanting a certain number of times daily. The verse was a prayer to Siva to take Parvati as his consort. After a month or two the devotee succeeded in celebrating his daughter's marriage.

My daughter was also of marriageable age and I thought of following the same device. For getting Bhagavan's clearance in the matter I wrote down the verse on a piece of paper and showed it to him saying whether there was any mistake in it. Bhagavan saw through it and asked, "Why do you want this? You need not do all these things.When the time comes, the bridegroom himself will come and take her away by hand." I gave up the idea; and my daughter was married as predicted by Bhagavan.

In December 1930, my brother's newborn daughter was brought to the Ashram for being named by Bhagavan.The two names familiar to him

were Lakshmi and Saraswathi. So, looking at the baby Bhagavan said, "Why not give her the name Saraswathi?" When told that there was already one Saraswathi, he named her Bala Saraswathi (*Bala* means younger).

Bhagavan insisted on *parayana* (repetition of sacred texts). He felt that though one may not be able to understand them in the first instance, gradually the ultimate meaning would flash by itself. Bhagavan also said that writing once is equivalent to reading ten times.

In the early 1930s, a dog called Jackie fell sick. Bhagavan arranged a soft bed for it in the hall and was tending it affectionately. After a few days it got more sick and started emitting a bad smell. It made no difference to Bhagavan's attention on it. Finally, it expired in his hands. It lies buried in the Ashram precincts, with a small monument over it.

107

P.V. Sastri, a lawyer, came to Sri Ramana in 1945 in the aftermath of death of his 23-year-old married son.

The event was so terrible and caused such grief that I thought I would not survive it. I neglected practically all my worldly duties for some time. Later, I got somehow attracted to Sri Ramanasramam and went there with my whole family. Having read about Sri Krishna's bringing His guru Sandipani's son back to life, we were so mad as to think to get our son restored to life by the grace of Bhagavan Sri Ramana.[1]

We reached Tiruvannamalai and entered the hall where Bhagavan used to sit. Our one idea was to beseech him to bring our son back to life; but despite our intense desire we found that we could not open our mouths to speak. We simply sat silent till Bhagavan rose for dinner and everyone went out. Then we too went back to the place where we stayed. We went to the hall again in the afternoon with the same purpose but with the same result.

In this way, we went to the hall each morning and afternoon continuously for seven days to implore Bhagavan to bring our son back to life but we could not utter a word in his presence. On the eighth day we talked it over together after coming out of the hall and decided that it was no use staying any longer since our purpose had not been fulfilled, and we decided to leave next morning.

At this time, a gentleman Subbarao met us. He was formerly a pleader at Nellore and had come to Tiruvannamalai and settled down as one

of the resident devotees. We became friends perhaps because I also was a pleader. He asked me what we were talking about, and I told him the whole story. I admitted that we felt peace in Bhagavan's presence, but the moment we left the hall our grief bursts out again like a volcanic eruption; and yet, we were unable to speak out and put our desire before Bhagavan.

Subbarao promised to take us to Bhagavan next day and introduce us to him. We agreed. The next day, on being introduced, we told Bhagavan about our grief and in a general way asked for his help. Bhagavan nodded his head and said, *Seri, Seri* (All right, all right), but we still found ourselves unable to talk any more, still less to tell him what it was that we really wanted. Again, we felt constrained to sit there speechless. That evening we decided to leave, since even the intervention of Subbarao had not helped us.

But Sri Ramana would not let us go. A thought occurred to me that I should buy some books published by the Ashram. When I went to the bookstall, the gentleman in charge was in meditation but opened his eyes immediately and asked us to come in. On being questioned by him, I repeated the whole story. He said that the Maharshi was capable of bringing the boy back to life, but since the boy was a highly religious and a devout young man he would have gone to better regions and would not like to come back to us. I assured him that he loved us so much and we loved him so much that he would really come back, if it were possible. The gentlemen then put me another question.

"Suppose Bhagavan brings him back to you and then both of you die, what will the position be then?" This question dispelled the thick cloud of illusion that had enveloped us and at last we saw that our attempt to get our son back was sheer madness. I felt at the time and feel even now that it was not the bookseller talking to me, but really Sri Bhagavan was speaking through him.

We abandoned the hope of getting our son back to life and also our plan of leaving immediately. We stayed for about twelve more days. The rest of our stay at the Ashram was only for the purpose of obtaining peace. Sri Ramana's 'all right' had been meant to help us in the only way in which a realized guru will help. His grace was bestowed on us and he began to work silently in our hearts to remove the thick clouds of sorrow and end the volcanic outbursts of grief. He began to instil peace and develop real knowledge in us. Silently and slowly the grace is still working in that direction. We were blessed with his grace and felt uplifted in the right way.

1. The legend has it that Lord Krishna brought back in flesh and blood his guru Sandipani's son, who was washed away by the sea.

108

M.M. Menon from Palghat (Kerala) came to Sri Ramana in the late 1940s. He wrote articles for *The Call Divine* on Advaita and great Indian sages.

During my second visit in May 1948, I was seated in the hall a few yards away from the couch of Bhagavan, immersed in the serenity and the peaceful silence emanating from him. After food, I approached the young *sannyasi* who was attending on Bhagavan and requested him to communicate to Bhagavan whether he would graciously clear a doubt of mine. Bhagavan readily consented and cast his encouraging look at me. It was easy for me to make the request, but I felt hopelessly embarrassed to carry out my decision. I thought that it would be an unpardonable crime to disturb the silence of the hall by my attempt to address Bhagavan and that the people in the hall might not look with favour at my audacity. I was confused and did not know how to start. I perspired profusely and felt very shy. I had no courage to open my mouth, even though I felt a great urge to talk to Bhagavan.

After about fifteen minutes Bhagavan beckoned to the *sannyasi* and asked him to tell me to go ahead with my doubt. Again I felt very shy and nervous and could not speak. Another quarter of an hour elapsed and still I did not address Bhagavan, when Bhagavan told the *sannyasi* again to ask me what my doubt was. Seeing how merciful and interested Bhagavan was, I could not delay any longer and I blurted out in Malayalam: "Bhagavan! I have heard about the *vichara marga* of yours, but have no clear conception of it. Is it to sit in a quiet place and ask oneself the question 'Who am I?' repeatedly or meditate on that question as on a mantra?"

On hearing my words all eyes turned towards me. Bhagavan replied tersely and clearly in Malayalam."No, it is not repeating or meditating on 'Who am I?'. It is to dive deep into yourself and seek the place from which the 'I' thought arises in you and to hold on to it firmly to the exclusion of any other thought. Continuous and persistent attempt will lead you to the Self."

I was overwhelmed with happiness.Though I had some vague idea akin to what Bhagavan has said, I felt Bhagavan had initiated me and that His Grace had descended on me. The bliss I felt could not be described. I could not contain myself and felt like sobbing. The happiness I felt then I am able to recall even now in all its intensity and I consider myself especially blessed by Bhagavan. I cannot recall the incident in my mind without realising how infinitely merciful Bhagavan was.

109

N.V. Gunaji was an advocate at Belgaum, Karnataka.

Having heard about Sri Ramana, and having a sincere desire and determination to see him, I succeeded in getting his address and reached the Ashram in January 1935. When I went to the hall, I found nobody except one man who welcomed me. I enquired about Bhagavan and was told that He had gone up the hill and that He would soon return. In a few minutes He did. I sat in the hall before Bhagavan for about an hour or so and found then, and ever afterwards, that Bhagavan's mere presence was radiating peace and happiness and that my mind was being stilled and becoming easy and light.

As Jnaneshwar, the premier sage-poet of Maharashtra, asked for a boon at the end of his celebrated commentary of the *Gita,* in the same strain I asked Bhagavan the following boon in the words (song) of the sage Jnaneshwar. I first explained the meaning of the song in English to Bhagavan as follows:

"Oh Bhagavan, if you are going to give us anything, give us this – Our ego should vanish, our sight (vision) should be focussed (on the self), thought should drop and the world should be no more. May we get natural happiness which depends not on the forms and objects of senses. As salt is dissolved in water, our minds should be merged in the Self."

Hearing this, Bhagavan was mightily pleased. He stretched himself up and in a loud voice proclaimed, "Take, take as much as you like, *get in, get in."* The features of Bhagavan at that time were a sight for the gods to see. I shall never forget the joyful, happy and shining feature of Bhagavan at the time.

In March 1949, I availed myself of an opportunity to go to the Ashram in connection with the consecretion ceremony of the newly built

Mother's temple. I then asked Bhagavan, "How to get in and stay there when we get in?" Bhagavan laughed, looked at me and answered, "Leave out the body-consciousness (the idea that I am the body) and then where is 'in' and where is 'out'? All life-consciousness is One throughout." What a fine and beautiful answer!

110

Sister Lalita from the Nilgiris has made a couple of contributions to *The Call Divine* describing her impressions while sitting before Sri Ramana.

So calm, so still, Bhagavan Sri Ramana sits. A pale gold ivory figure, with a slim, aged, feeble body, and the face of a child. I felt a divine peace, the glory of stillness.

The eyes are the most remarkable feature of his face. They are the windows of everlasting spirit.They show the shining calm of God within their delicate shells, clear, wide open, gentle, candid eyes; yet deep, seeing into the Self within; innocent, yet understanding; all compassionate, yet thoroughly weighing and understanding the play of life. At times these eyes rest in mild scrutiny of the people around, singling out for a moment one or another of the crowd, then pass on with complete detachment, yet, with a gentle withdrawal, a wish to make others content.

Sometimes in deep thought he sits, chin resting on hand, the spirit withdrawn to unknown heights. Sometimes in a gentle soft voice he speaks a few words to someone whose thought beckons his attention.

What has this silent abstracted man to give to others? The fact that there are others around him proves that he has something to give.

These are the thoughts I got, seated on the floor, in that quiet room presided over by that silent figure.

111

C.V. Subramania Iyer, a regular visitor to the Ashram, was Assistant Director, Public Health, Madras.

Once four ladies came to the Ashram and sat in the hall in front of

Bhagavan. One of them, an American lady, asked Bhagavan, "Can we have your grace for our spiritual development?" Bhagavan replied, "If you had not the grace you would not have thought of coming here."

Then the lady said, "Bhagavan, I am going back to America; will you come there?" Bhagavan with a smile on His face and in a tone expressing certainty replied, "I am already there. I am above time and space."

To an earnest enquirer Bhagavan would always say, "You are already That, only the veil of ignorance has to be removed." Swami Vivekananda used to tell his followers: Don't believe the self-possessed teacher who says, 'I see, but you cannot see.' Bhagavan never observed any secrecy with regard to His teachings.

His attitude was plain and always encouraging. He would say, "You are already Real, you are not going to realize anything new. Your effort must be directed towards removing the veil of ignorance by enquiry."

Lord Arunachala chose Ramana as the suitable field or fitting vehicle through which He could manifest Himself. Lord Krishna says in the *Gita* (IV.7): "Whenever there is decay of righteousness, O Bharata, and there is uprise of unrighteousness, I myself come forth." Even so Lord Arunachala chose to manifest himself as Ramana. Accordingly, without any effort on His own part and purely through divine will Ramana had the unique experience whereby He understood clearly that the body is separate from the undying Self.

In all His subsequent activities Sri Ramana was merely an instrument in the hands of an unseen power. Like an automaton, He left a note before leaving home to His brother wherein He referred to the call from His Father. He came to Tiruvannamalai and surrendered Himself completely to Lord Arunachala. He lost His separate individuality and realized that He was the one Self. When Bhagavan was once asked by a devotee why He regarded Arunachala as His Father, He gave no reply but just smiled.

It is a mistake to suppose that Sri Ramana performed severe austerities. To all appearances He was doing hard *tapas*. But He had already reached the goal without any effort on His part, for Arunachala had given Him His own seat.There was no need for Him to perform *tapas*. He sat silently without any effort on the Aruna Hill communicating by silence the Divine Call to the people of the world.

112

Jagadeeswara Sastri (1894-1983) was a distinguished Sanskrit scholar, associated with Sri Ramana for four decades. Devaraja Mudaliar (no.35) used to call him the Sanskrit poet of Bhagavan's court. Sri Ramana called him Jagadeesa, indicating his affection and closeness.

A.R.Natarajan records that in 1945 Sastri got a terminal illness which did not respond to the best medical treatment. Sastri invoked Sri Ramana's grace, who had in some mysterious way a soft corner for him. A natural poet, Sastri surrendered to Sri Ramana composing eight exquisite pieces of poetry called* Prapatti Ashtakam *through which he poured out his heart. Sri Ramana pulled him out of the jaws of death, and blessed him with a long life.

Sastri told the following to Chhaganlal V. Yogi (no.55):

I went to Sri Bhagavan in the Virupaksha Cave[1] to listen to his spiritual talk. As the talk did not end till well after midnight, I decided to sleep in front of the cave instead of returning to the town. This was a brave act because in those days wild animals used to roam on the hill. I was snoring in deep sleep. Bhagavan who felt concerned about my safety put a pinch of snuff up my nose. I woke up startled and began to sneeze uncontrollably. Bhagavan laughed heartily, and affectionately told me to go and sleep inside the cave. I was so sleepy at the time that I stumbled inside the cave and immediately fell asleep again.

***Chhaganlal Yogi says that once Sastri and he were walking together in Bombay. The tar roads of the city got very hot in summer and he found it hard to believe that anyone could walk on them without footwear. He asked Sastri whether his feet have not got burned walking on the road. Sastri answered in the negative and added, "I have already got* ravi raksha *(protection from the sun) from Bhagavan. I may walk in any amount of heat but nothing ever happens to me." Then Sastri told him how he got* ravi raksha:**

One day, right in the middle of the afternoon, Bhagavan took his *kamandalu* and asked me to accompany him on a walk about the mountain. When I protested as to how we could move about in such weather, he said,

"You can move just the same way as I do. Am I not a man with two feet, just like you?" Having realised that it would be useless to argue any more, I started walking with Bhagavan [Who never wore any footwear.] The exposed stones were terribly hot because of the severe heat of the sun, and walking on them made my feet burn. For some time I bore the suffering, but when it became unbearable I cried out, "Bhagavan, my feet are burning so much! I cannot walk one more step. Even standing here is difficult. On all sides it is raining fire! If I remain in this terrible heat any more, my head will crack open and I will die."

Bhagavan smiled and said in very quiet and deep voice, "Jagadeesa, give up your fear and listen. You must have the *bhavana* (mental conviction and attitude) that you are the sun. Start doing *japa* of the mantra *Suryosmi* (I am the sun) with the conviction that it is really true. You will soon see the effect of it. You yourself will become *surya swarupa*, that is, you will have the characteristics of the sun. Can the sun feel the heat of the sun?"

I followed Bhagavan's instructions and started doing *japa* of the sun mantra. In a short time, I began to feel the effect of the *japa*. The severity of the heat lessened and eventually I began to experience, instead of the severe heat, a pleasing coolness. As the burning sensation diminished, I found that I was able to walk quickly alongside Bhagavan. Later, I was astonished to discover that the effect of chanting this mantra was permanent. Though I no longer chant it, I have never again suffered from the heat of the sun. I can now walk in the summer on tar roads with bare feet without discomfort.

Sastri was responsible for eliciting Sri Ramana's famous Sanskrit* sloka.*The story, recorded in 1948 by Suri Nagamma (no.39), as related to her by Sri Ramana himself is as follows:

"One day in 1915, Jagadeesa wrote down on a piece of paper '*Hridaya kuhara madhye*' and held it in his hand. When I asked him what it was, he said that he wanted to write a *sloka*, but when he began it, he could write only that much. When I advised him to write the rest, he said that he was unable to do so however much he tried. After a time, he went somewhere, leaving the paper under my seat. Before his return, I completed the sloka, and wrote underneath the word 'Jagadeesa'. I gave it to him on his return. When he enquired as to why I had given his name to it, I replied because Jagadeesa had begun it."

[The *sloka* means: in the interior cavity of the Heart [on the right side of the chest] the one Supreme Being *Brahman* alone shines in the form of the *atman* with direct immediacy as 'I' 'I'. Enter into the Heart with one-pointed mind, either through self-enquiry, that is, constantly enquiring within yourself as to who am I, or by diving deep within, or through control of breath, and abide ever in the *atman*."]

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1. Sri Ramana lived here from 1899 to 1916. (*See* photograph nos. 3 (i) & (ii) and 4 (i) in the book.)

113

Ramananda Swarnagiri authored *Crumbs from His Table* (1937). The preface of this book states: The taste of the few crumbs would alone be sufficient to induce the readers to seek the bread of life itself at His hands, and serve my ambition to create such an interest in Him and in His teachings.

In 1933 I visited Sri Avadhuta Swami at Sendamangalam, Salem. While going round the idol of Sri Dattatreya on the summit of the hill, where the Swami has his cave, I chanced to see a photo of a very young ascetic, who looked like a boy just out of school, not more than twenty years of age. The penetrating eyes and youthful appearance of the young yogi captivated me. I was told that the sage lived at Tiruvannamalai and was a perfect *jnani*.

I visited Sri Ramanasramam in March 1934 and prostrated before Sri Ramana in the hall. Bhagavan asked me, "Who are you?" I said, "I am Narayanaswami." [His actual name.] He said, "Is it the body, the mouth or the hands that represent the 'I' you are talking about?" and added, "you are different from the body. You are the possessor, and the body is your possession." When I said, "I am different from my body, but I cannot clearly see the line of demarcation between my body and my Self", Bhagavan suggested, "Put the question to your Self and you will know who you are, tracing the source from which the 'I' springs."

Sri Ramana had given me something to work on. I was satisfied with the lesson and having purchased a copy of his *Life and Teachings* (in Tamil) read it that very night at the Ashram itself. The more I read it, the more I was attracted to Bhagavan, and his example and teachings appealed to me immensely.

I was about to put a question to Bhagavan and just as I began to do so, he answered me by referring me to Paul Brunton's *The Secret Path* and remarked that, as stated therein, speech only beclouded argument and disturbed the silent communication of thought.

Sri Bhagavan was correcting and aiding some youngsters in memorising his *Upadesa Saaram*. I was wondering at the futility of coaching such youngsters who could not understand the ABC of the philosophical verses. Thoûgh I had not uttered a single word, Sri Bhagavan turned to me and remarked, "These childeren might not understand the meaning of these verses, yet these would be of immense help to them, and would be recalled with great relief and pleasure, when they come of age and are in difficulties."

The next day, in the company of some of my friends, I visited a Sanskrit and Tamil scholar, who was for sometime a Sanskrit teacher in one of the Local Board High Schools and who was living close to most of the places where Bhagavan was reported to have spent his early life. [The reference is to Ganapati Muni (no. 91)]. When we came to a place where Bhagavan was said to have sat in the evenings, he took a small quantity of the earth and smeared it on his forehead. He also dropped a small bit of the earth into his mouth and said, "The very ground on which such a holy person sat was sacred. His footprints were worth all the spheres that rolled in the heaven."

During my third visit, I saw a well-educated youth in the hall in a meditative posture. He sat continuously for hours together and some devotees appeared almost envious of his rapid progress. Perhaps to take care of the doubt, Bhagavan said one day, "The boy was not meditating upon God or Self, but praying to him [Sri Ramana] for his grace to get a job." He added, "Worldly people should obtain fulfilment of their desire where it is available. I am a *sannyasi* without any possessions or work."

The unemployed youth, who had overheard the conversation, though he appeared outwardly oblivious to what was going on around him, discovered that the cat was out of the bag.

Regarding food requirements for *sadhana*, Bhagavan often remarked, "The aspirants should eat a very moderate quantity of whatever food comes their way and not stipulate, discriminate, or pick and choose in the matter of diet." His insistence was on continuous one-pointed enquiry (Who am I?), like *thailadhara* – unbroken flow of oil while being poured from one vessel to another.

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Mercedes de Acosta, a Spanish American who came to Sri Ramana in 1938, was a Hollywood socialite and scriptwriter for films. Long after meeting Sri Ramana she wrote the book *Here Lies the Heart*, which was dedicated to: *Thou Spiritual Guide – Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, the only completely egoless, world detached and pure being, I have ever known.*

A Search in Secret India by Paul Brunton [No.1] had a profound influence on me. In it I learned for the first time about Ramana Maharshi, a great Indian saint and sage. It was as though some emanation of this saint was projected out of the book to me. For days and nights after reading about him I could not think of anything else. I became, as it were, possessed by him. I could not even talk of anything else. Nothing could distract me from the idea that I must go and meet this saint. The whole direction of my life turned towards India. I felt that I would surely go there.

I had very little money, far too little to risk going to India, but something pushed me towards my goal. I went to the steamship company and booked myself one of the cheapest cabins on the S.S.Victoria.

In Madras I hired a car, and so anxious was I to reach the Ashram that I did not go to bed and travelled by night, arriving about seven O'clock in the morning. I was very tired as I got out of the car in a small square in front of the Arunachaleswara Temple.[1] The driver explained he could take me no further. I turned towards the Ashram in the hot sun along the two miles of dust-covered road to reach the abode of the Sage. As I walked that distance, deeply within myself I knew that I was moving towards the greatest experience of my life.

When I first entered the hall, I perceived Bhagavan at once, sitting in the Buddha posture on his couch in the corner. At the same moment I felt overcome by some strong power in the hall, as if an invisible wind was pushing violently against me. For a moment I felt dizzy. Then I recovered myself. To my great surprise I suddenly heard an American voice calling out to me, 'Hello, come in.' It was the voice of an American named Guy Hague, who had already been with the Maharshi for a year. He came towards me, took my hand, leading me to a place beside him. I was able to look around the hall, but my gaze was drawn to Bhagavan, who was sitting absolutely straight looking directly in front of him.

His eyes did not blink or move. Because they seemed so full of light I had the impression they were grey. I learned later that they were brown, although there have been various opinions as to the colour of his eyes. His body was naked except for a loincloth. As he sat there he seemed like a statue, and yet something extraordinary emanated from him. **I had a feeling that on some invisible level I was receiving spiritual shocks from him,** although his gaze was not directed towards me. He did not seem to be looking at anything, and yet I felt he could see and was conscious of the whole world. Hague whispered, "Bhagavan is in *samadhi.*"

After I had been sitting for sometime, Hague suggested that I go and sit near the Maharshi. He said, "You can never tell when Bhagavan will come out of *samadhi.* When he does, I am sure he will be pleased to see you."

I moved near Bhagavan, sitting at his feet and facing him. Not long after this Bhagavan opened his eyes. He moved his head and looked directly down at me, his eyes looking into mine. It would be impossible to describe that moment and I am not going to attempt it. I can only say that at that time I felt my inner being raised to a new level – as if, suddenly, my state of consciousness was lifted to a much higher degree. Perhaps in that split second I was no longer my human self but the Self. **Then Bhagavan smiled at me. It seemed to me that I had never before known what a smile was.** I said, "I have come a long way to see you."

There was silence. I had stupidly brought a piece of paper on which I had written a number of questions I wanted to ask. I fumbled for it in my pocket, but the questions were already answered by merely being in his presence. There was no need for questions or answers. Nevertheless, I asked, "Tell me, whom shall I follow – what shall I follow? I have been trying to find this out for years." Again there was silence. After a few minutes, which seemed to me a long time, he spoke, "You are not telling the truth. You are just using words – just talking. You know perfectly well whom to follow. Why do you need me to confirm it?" "You mean I should follow my inner self?" I asked. His response was, "I don't know anything about your inner self. You should follow the Self. There is nothing or no one else to follow."

I asked again, "What about religions, teachers, gurus?" He said, "Yes, if they can help in the quest for the Self. Can a religion, which teaches you to look outside yourself, which promises a heaven and a reward outside yourself, be of help to you? It is only by diving deep into the spiritual Heart

that one can find the Self." He placed his right hand on his right breast and continued, "Here lies the Heart, the dynamic, spiritual Heart. It is called *hridaya* and is located on the right side of the chest and is clearly visible to the inner eye of an adept on the spiritual path. Through meditation you can learn to find the Self in the cave of this Heart."

I said, "Bhagavan, you say that I am to take up the search for the Self by *atma vichara*, asking myself the question 'Who Am I?' May I ask who are you?" Bhagavan answered, "When you know the Self, the 'I', 'You', 'He', and 'She' disappear. They merge together in pure Consciousness."

To write about my experience with Bhagavan, to recapture and record all that he said, or all that his silences implied is trying to put the infinite into an egg cup. On me he had, and still has, a profound influence. I feel it presumptuous to say he changed my life. My life was perhaps not so important as all that. But **I definitely saw life differently after I had been in his presence,** a presence that just by merely 'being' was sufficient spiritual nourishment for a lifetime.

I sat in the hall with Bhagavan three days and three nights. Sometimes he spoke to me, other times he was silent and I did not interrupt his silence. Often he was in *samadhi.* I wanted to stay on there with him but finally he told me that I should go back to America. He said, "There will be what will be called a war, but which, in reality, will be a great world revolution. Every country and every person will be touched by it. You must return to America. Your destiny is not in India at this time."

Before I bid a sorrowful farewell to Bhagavan, he gave me some verses he had selected from the *Yoga Vasistha.* These contained the essence for the path of a pure life: (i) Steady in the state of fullness, which shines when all desires are given up, and peaceful in the state of freedom in life, act playfully in the world, O Raghava! (ii) Inwardly free from all desires, dispassionate and detached, but outwardly active in all directions, act playfully in the world, O Raghava! (iii) Free from egotism, with mind detached as in sleep, pure like the sky, ever untainted, act playfully in the world, O Raghava!

When I returned from India, undiscerning people saw very little change in me. But there was a transformation of my entire consciousness. And how could it have been otherwise? I had been in the atmosphere of an egoless, world-detached and completely pure being.

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1. *Refer* annexure-I, p. 410.

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T.K.Sundaresa Iyer (1896-1965), a school teacher at Tiruvannamalai, acted as an interpreter for English-speaking visitors at the Ashram. He also helped the Ashram in regard to its correspondence on spiritual matters, under the Maharshi's guidance. *At the Feet of Bhagavan* records his reminiscences.

In 1908, when I was 12 years old, Bhagavan was in the Virupaksha Cave. My cousin, Krishnamurthy, used to go to Bhagavan everyday and sing before him songs of devotion and worship. One day when I asked him about his daily visits, he told me, "The Lord of the Hill Himself sits there in human form. Why don't you come with me?" I too climbed the hill and found Bhagavan sitting on a stone slab, with about ten devotees around him. Each one would sing a song. Bhagavan turned to me and asked, "Well, won't you sing?" I agreed. The substance of my song was: "Oh Lord, grant that my tongue may repeat Thy Name even when my mind strays." Bhagavan felt happy and said, "Yes, that is what must be done", and I took it to be his teaching for me. From that time on I went to him regularly for several years, never missing a day.

One day I wondered why I was visiting him at all. What was the use? Going up the hill was a meaningless toil. I decided to end my visits. After three months when I could suffer no longer, I ran up the hill. When I fell at his feet, I could not restrain myself and burst out in tears. Bhagavan pulled me up and asked, "It is over three months since I saw you. Where were you?" I told him how I thought that seeing him was of no use. "All right," he said, "may be it is of no use, so what? You felt the loss, did you not?" Then I understood that I did not go to him for profit, but because away from him there was no life for me.

Whenever I went up the hill, I used to take some eatables as an offering. One day I had no money. I stood before Bhagavan in a dejected mood and said, "This poor man has brought nothing." Bhagavan looked at me enquiringly and remarked, "Why, you have brought the main thing. All else is unimportant." I wondered, not knowing what I brought. Bhagavan said laughingly, "Don't you understand? You brought yourself."

In those days, Bhagavan's figure was like a statue of burnished gold. He simply sat and sat, and rarely spoke. **He was an enchanting personality, who shed a captivating lustre on all, and a life-giving**

current flowed from him, charging all those nearby, while his sparkling eyes irrigated all those around him with the nectar of his Being.

The mantra '*Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya*' had fascinated me greatly in my early days. After coming to Bhagavan, I thought when Ramana is himself Vasudeva, why should I worship Vasudeva separately? I found '*Om Namo Bhagavate Sri Ramanaya*' had the same number of syllables. I told this to Bhagavan who gave his approval to the new mantra.

On an *amavasya*, as I had to perform my late father's ceremony, I refused to take breakfast at the Ashram along with others. Bhagavan said as my father was already in heaven, nothing more need be done for him and my taking breakfast would not hurt him in any way. Accustomed as I was to the age-old tradition, I hesitated to sit. Bhagavan got up, made me sit and eat some *iddlies*. From that time onwards, I gave up performing ceremonies for ancestors.[1]

Once someone placed the *Periapuranam* in Bhagavan's hands. He began reading out of it. Now Bhagavan was a pastmaster at story telling. His solo acting was ever the admiration of his devotees. His modulation of voice of different characters, suiting gestures and postures of each incident, were wonderfully effective. His devotees never missed a chance of being in the hall on such occasions.

Bhagavan began with the life of the hunter-devotee Kannappan[2] who worshipped Sivalinga with water carried in his mouth, flowers taken from his hair, and beef prepared for his own meal. The way in which the priest resented the intruding defiler of the sacred Sivalinga was embellished by Bhagavan with his own explanations of the rites and the meanings of the mantras used in the worship. Then came the scene of scenes. The Lord in the Sivalinga tested the devotee by making blood trickle from the eyes on that Linga. Kannappan ran to and fro for herbs to treat the Lord's eye with them. Finding them useless, he plucked out one of his own eyes and fixed it to that in the Sivalinga. Seeing that the treatment was effective, he ran into ecstasy of joyful dance.

When Bhagavan came to the story of how the forest devotee was plucking out his second eye to heal the second eye of the Lord, and of how the Sivalinga extended a hand to stop him, saying, 'Stop Kannappan', Bhagavan's voice got choked, his body perspired profusely, his hair stood on end, tears gushed out of his eyes, he could hardly utter a word, and there was pin-drop silence in the hall. All were dumbfounded that this great *jnani* could be so overpowered by emotion and ecstasy at

the hunter's devotion. After a while, Bhagavan quietly closed the book, dried the tears with the end of his towel and laid aside the book, saying, "No, I can't go on any further."

About 1920, Kavyakantha Ganapati Muni came to reside at Tiruvannamalai. He used to discuss *sastras* with Bhagavan and get his doubts cleared. He was a mighty scholar, while Bhagavan was just literate, yet the Muni would say, "Without Bhagavan's grace, the intricacies of the scriptures are beyond one's power of understanding. One word from him makes everything clear." When Ganapati Muni would see someone sitting in front of Bhagavan, meditating with his eyes closed, he would scold the devotee, saying, "When the Sun is shining in front of you, why do you need to close your eyes?"

At the Skandasram a peacock would follow Bhagavan everywhere. One day a huge black cobra appeared in the Ashram and the peacock attacked it fiercely. The cobra spread its hood and the two natural enemies were poised for a fight to death. Bhagavan went near the cobra and said, "Why did you come here? The peacock will kill you. Better go away at once." The cobra lowered its hood and slithered away.

In 1933, on my 36th birthday, I sat in Bhagavan's presence in a pensive mood. I addressed a prayer in Tamil to him complaining: "O, Bhagavan, I have completed three and half decades, and yet have not had the experience of the real you. Pray, let me have this day the touch of Your Grace." Handing over the slip of paper, I prostrated before him. He made me sit down and gazed steadily at me; I was still in a pensive and meditative mood. All of a sudden I lost body-consciousness, and was absorbed in the Maharshi. I got turned inward, and the voice of Bhagavan made me see whatever I desired.

I was very much devoted to Sri Rama; I wanted to have his *darshan*. Immediately I saw Sri Rama with Sita, Lakshmana, Bharata, Satrughana and Hanuman. The ecstasy of the vision defied description. I simply sat on, with the Maharshi gazing at me. Two hours may thus have passed in pin-drop silence, lost in the vision, until it vanished. I prostrated at the feet of the Maharshi, with tears of ecstasy in my eyes and my hair standing on end.

Bhagavan gave us a tangible demonstration of God's omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence.

Though outwardly we seemed to remain very much the same persons, inwardly he was working to destroy the deep roots of separateness and self-concern in us.

A couple from Peru, who had heard of the Maharshi's greatness, came to the Ashram. Being poor they had to save enough money for a few years to become deck passengers. To the couple, the Maharshi's presence on the earth seemed the second coming of the Christ himself and they longed to see him.

One evening when they sat before Bhagavan, the talk turned to Peru. The couple was describing the seacoast and beach of their town. Just then Bhagavan remarked, "Is not the beach paved with marble slabs, with coconut palms planted in between? Are there not marble benches in rows facing the sea, and did you not often sit on the fifth of those with your wife?" This remark came as a great astonishment to the couple and as they were wondering and were at a loss to understand as to how the Maharshi could know such minute details, Bhagavan smiled and remarked, "It does not matter how I can tell. Enough if you know that the Self is not limited by space and time."

Knowles, an Italian, well read in both Eastern and Western philosophies once came to the Ashram and had many interesting talks with Bhagavan. One morning, Bhagavan was describing the state of a *jivanmukta*: "He is the ever-aware Self, the witness-consciousness transcending space and time and causation, the fullness of Being. How he is the non-actor, non-enjoyer, and yet at the same time the greatest of actors, the greatest of enjoyers and so forth." This was too much for Knowles to digest. In the heat of the discussion he put a straight question to Bhagavan, "Are you or are you not speaking to us?" Bhagavan gave Knowles a meaningful look and said in a most emphatic tone: "No, 'I' am not talking to you." In an ecstatic mood, Knowles echoed: "No, Bhagavan is not talking to us. He only exists. That is all."

In the late 1930s, when Bhagavan's *Nool Thirattu* (published as *Collected Works* in English) was ready for the press, it was proposed that a preface be written to it. But no one came forward for the job, each one excusing himself that he was not qualified for the task. This drama, which went on for long, was watched by Bhagavan quietly. At about 10.30 p.m., as I was passing beside the hall, Bhagavan looked at me and said, "Why don't you write the preface?" I was taken aback, but meekly said, "I would venture to write only if I had Bhagavan's blessings for the task." Bhagavan said, "Do write, it will come all right." So I began writing at the dead of night, and to my great surprise within three quarters of an hour I made a draft as if impelled, driven by some Supreme Force. I altered not even a comma of it, and by three O'clock in the early morning I placed it

at the feet of Bhagavan. He was happy and approved it as all right.

Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi, ***entry dated July 20, 1936, records:***

T.K.S.Iyer, a disciple, was agitated because someone in the town had spoken disparagingly of the Master and he had failed to retort. So he asked the Master what penalty should be paid for his failure to defend him. The Maharshi replied, "Patience, more patience; tolerance, more tolerance."

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1. *Refer* paras 2, 3 & 4, p. 158, for a similar incident.
2. *Refer* annexure – III, p. 412, for the story.

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T.R.Kanakammal's uncle Ramakrishna Iyer, a *Munsif* at Tiruvannamalai, was one of the earliest devotees of Sri Ramana. Her father had also settled down in the town. Married against her wishes, she never led a family life. The book *Cherished Memories* (originally in Tamil) and the video *Guru Ramana* contain her memoires.

I have been visiting the Ashram regularly, but came to settle permanently in 1946. A few days before shifting, I had a strange and wonderful experience. It was my normal practice to get up at four in the morning and spend time in meditation. One morning, when I had not risen from the bed, I felt Bhagavan sitting beside me caressing my neck and throat. He smiled and said, "What is it that you gave me? Why is it that I love you so much?" All my senses were aware of Bhagavan's presence by my side. I have no idea how long I lay like that. Even after getting up, I continued to be aware of some unusual feeling deep in my heart. A great peace had taken possession of my senses. Though I carried on with my routine activities, I was in a dazed state. My parents noticed the change in me. They had no choice but to let me have my way, and allowed me to be in Bhagavan's company.

Living alone in a room near the Ashram, managing cooking and handling many domestic chores, meant difficulties and frustrations. But every morning my heart sang at the very thought of spending the day in Bhagavan's presence. Entering the Ashram I could feel a transformation within myself. All my petty worries disappeared as if by magic. I also

found each one of my faculties slowly calming down. It is difficult to describe this feeling. At times, it was as though I was totally detached from my body. I was in a state of ecstasy.

Sometimes, I found Bhagavan directing his eyes at me. The intensity of his gaze was, at times, almost impossible to bear. My mind would get completely absorbed in the Self without any kind of effort on my part. The peace and joy of the experience used to linger on for a long time after leaving the hall.

One day, after I prostrated and settled down in the hall, Bhagavan's eyes stayed on me. **Bhagavan's gaze makes it impossible for you to keep your eyes open. The intensity of his direct look is too much for an ordinary human being to take. It is as though some invisible power has entered you and made its way to the very core of your being and there is nothing but the blissful awareness of the Self.**

When this happened for a short while, I would gaze at Bhagavan with my eyes open. But within a few seconds, my eyes would close of their own accord and I got totally immersed in a peace, which is beyond description. I do not know how long I would stay in that state of bliss. When I managed to open my eyes, I saw that Bhagavan's gaze was still upon me. Then I saw Bhagavan getting up and going out of the hall. I also stood up. Kameswaramma (a lady devotee) embraced me and with tears in her eyes, said, "Kanakamma, you are indeed fortunate. Bhagavan's eyes were on you all the time. Not for a moment did he shift his gaze. I was watching you and Bhagavan all the time. Bhagavan has been extremely gracious to you today. What more can you want!" I was unable to respond to these words because I was in a state beyond speech. The state of my mind was indescribable. I felt a deep peace within me, which stayed for many days afterwards. Everytime I think about that day's experience, I feel the same thrill of ecstasy.

One day a young, well-educated man came to Bhagavan, prostrated and sat down. Addressing Bhagavan he said, "Ramakrishna Paramahamsa was able to elevate Vivekananda to the state of *nirvikalpa samadhi* with just a touch. Can Bhagavan do the same for me?" Bhagavan did not say anything.The young man waited with obvious impatience for Bhagavan's reply. After a few minutes of silence, Bhagavan looked at the youth and, in a soft voice asked, "You are another Vivekananda, I presume?" The young man was taken aback. He was at a loss for words. Greatly embarrassed, he left the hall quietly.

Bhagavan then told us, "It is difficult to appreciate the need for self-analysis and self-criticism. The tendency is to think of oneself as perfect. Though this person was eager to see whether I had the power of Sri Ramakrishna, he was not bothered whether he himself merited comparison with Vivekananda. That is because he assumed that he was perfect. Sri Ramakrishna bestowed that rare state upon Vivekananda alone because he was a person of rare spiritual merit."

Once Subbalakshmi Ammal [No.68], a long-standing devotee and a cook at the Ashram was indiscriminately plucking flowers from a bush. Bhagavan asked, "What are you doing, Lakshmi?" She replied, "I am plucking flowers for *puja*." Pointing to the towel, which she had spread on the ground to collect flowers, Bhagavan said, "You already have so many flowers. Why pluck more?" The lady artlessly replied, "There are so many flowers on this bush. I thought it would be better to gather them, rather than let them go waste." Bhagavan retorted, "You have already seen and enjoyed the sight of the bush laden with beautiful flowers. Now you do not care whether anybody else gets a chance to enjoy the same heart-warming sight. Or may be you have some exclusive right over this bush. Did you plant it and nurture it yourself, thus making it your personal property?" Subbalakshmi Ammal told us that after the incident, she was reminded of Bhagavan's words everytime she saw a flowering bush!

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Srikrishnaprem, formerly Prof. Ronald Nixon from England, taught literature at Benaras and Lucknow universities before he became a *Vaishnavite sannyasi*. He lived in Almora in the Yashoda Mai's ashram. The story of his visit to Tiruvannamalai in 1948 is as told by his friend Dilip Kumar Roy (no. 8).

He entered the room where the Maharshi was reclining and sat down among the devotees to meditate. As soon as he did so, he heard a voice saying over and over again, Who are you? Who are you? Who are you? He tried to ignore it but eventually he replied mentally, "I am Krishna's servant." The voice still went on to ask, "Who was Krishna?" He answered, "Nanda's son. He is an *avatar,* the one-in-all, the resident in every heart."

Next morning, when he sat down in the hall with other devotees,

the Maharshi gave him a lightning glance and smiled at him. He closed his eyes. Then on a sudden impulse he found himself silently asking the Maharshi, "Who are you?" When something made him open his eyes, he found that the Maharshi's couch was empty. He closed his eyes again; but in a moment he opened them. The Maharshi who was reclining in his usual place gave him a fleeting smile and a meaningful glance.

***V. Ganesan in his book* Moments Remembered *records*:**

Srikrishnaprem would always carry a shoulder bag in which he kept in a glass-case the images of Radha and Krishna. Only while going to bed would he remove the bag from his shoulder. He was a staunch *Vaishnavite*. He once quoted *'sarvam Vasudevamayam jagat'*[1] and asked Bhagavan, "Is not this the highest ideal?".

Bhagavan nodded his head in agreement and said, "Yes, Yes! It is an exalted state of Consciousness. Yet, who is it that thinks that all that is perceived is Vasudeva? Is it not you, yourself? While seeing the earth, trees and plants as Vasudeva, don't you wish to see yourself as He? If you who see everything as Vasudeva, learn to see yourself as Vasudeva you will become Vasudeva Himself. If he who sees is transformed into Vasudeva, then that which is seen automatically becomes Vasudeva! Acharya Sankara's *drishtim jnanamayeem kritva* (infuse perception with *jnana*) is simply this."

Balarama Reddy in his book* My Reminiscences *records:

One evening, Srikrishnaprem was asked to sing *bhajans* before Bhagavan. About seventy five devotees had gathered to hear him sing. He sang with deep, genuine devotion, even pronouncing the words with an Indian accent. All were moved by his renditions. Bhagavan later commented, "Here is one Westerner who embodies the intensity and devotion of a true Indian *bhakta.*"

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1. Everything is pervaded by Lord Vasudeva, i.e., Krishna.

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Prof. Pryns Hopkins (1885-1970), an American social psychologist, has authored many books on his subject. He visited Sri Ramana after reading Brunton's *A Search in Secret India* (no.1).

I was requested to take my seat in the front row and an interpreter sat next to me. The Maharshi was saying that we only know the object through sensation derived from it remotely. Physicists have shown that in place of what we thought to be a solid object there are only dancing electrons and protons.

I asked, "If the outer phenomena which I perceive have no reality apart from my ego, how is it that someone else also perceived them? For example, not only do I lift my foot higher to avoid tripping over that stool yonder, but you also raise your foot higher to avoid tripping over it. Is it a mere coincidence that each of us independently has come to the conclusion that a stool is there?"

The Maharshi replied that the stool and our two egos were created by one another mutually. While one is asleep, one may dream of a stool and of persons who avoided tripping over it just as persons in waking life did, yet did that prove that the dream stool is any more real? And so we had it back and forth for an hour, the gathering feeling amused.

The Maharshi went on to say that the essential thing is to divorce our sense of Self from what our ego and body are feeling or doing. We should think, "Feelings are going on, this body is acting in such and such a manner," but never, "I feel, I act."

I objected, "You have told us that all the animal propensities are attributes of the ego. If when a man attains *jivanmukti* he ceases to feel responsibility for the behaviour of his ego and body, won't they run amok completely?" The Maharshi replied, "When you have attained *jivanmukti* you will know the answer to this question. Your task now is not to worry about it, but to know the Self."

I said, "Here before us is the Maharshi who has attained *jivanmukti*, and so has withdrawn from all responsibility for the conduct of his ego and the body. But though he declares them to be the seat of all evil propensities, his ego and body continue to behave quite decorously instead of running wild." He retorted, "Let the Maharshi deal with that problem if it arises and let Mr. Hopkins deal with who is Mr. Hopkins."

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Major-General V.N.Parameswaran Pillai, O.B.E., retired as G.O.C. of the former Travancore State (Kerala) Forces. Even while in service he had a deeply religious bent of mind. After

sannyasa diksha **in 1958 he was known as Swami Paresananda.**

In 1936, I was a Captain in the Travancore State Forces and an A.D.C. to His Highness the Maharaja. His Highness and the Royal Mother went to Madras from where they paid a visit to Sri Ramanasramam. When the Maharaja returned, I wondered whether it was not my bad luck that I was not taken as A.D.C. on that tour. In the meantime, one morning my friend Narayana Pillai, the Controller of Stationery told me that he was starting for Sri Ramanasramam the next day and asked whether I would like to join him. I was, however, not confident of getting permission from His Highness at such short notice.

A few hours later, when I reported for duty at the palace, His Highness said, of his own accord, that if I wanted to visit Sri Ramanasramam I could go with Narayana. This sudden and unexpected permission made me speechless for a few seconds.

Narayana and I reached the Ashram. He being a frequent visitor, accommodation was no problem. We proceeded to the hall for Bhagavan's *darshan*. The hall was almost full with visitors. As we entered, the scene brought to my memory, *slokas* from *Dakshinamurthi Stotra.* I felt as if Dakshinamurthi Himself was reclining on the couch.

Bhagavan noticed us, and after a while he sat up and beckoned me. We did not know whom he was summoning. I was a stranger, Narayana thought he was being called and he got up. Bhagavan signalled 'No'. When I was pointed out and the Maharshi nodded assent, everybody was surprised and became curious about me. I was also surprised. After I postrated he beckoned me to come nearer and gazed at me for a while and smiled. Then he told his attendant, "Bring that book". It was brought and the Maharshi presented it to me. It was a Malayalam translation of the Maharshi's Tamil book the *Gitasaram.* I was overwhelmed with joy and devotion.

Then it was time for the midday meal. In the dining hall the Maharshi asked me to sit in the opposite row, just facing him. While eating, he enquired tenderly, how was the food? and so on. He also said, take enough rice, curry, eat slowly, etc. Throughout he was talking to me only. This made others wonder who this favoured one might be. I felt that it was all due to some merit accumulated in past lives. "Omniscient as he is, the Maharshi understands the heart of every one," this belief of mine was confirmed.

Narayana was a regular visitor to the Ashram, but the Maharshi had never spoken to him. When I received such favours from him, it was natural for Narayana to feel that there was something lacking in him. The Maharshi could easily understand this. The same day he presented a book to Narayana also and made him feel gratified.

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N.O. Mehta was a devotee from Gujarat.

Dilip Kumar Roy [No.8] and myself reached the Ashram on February 17, 1949, and promptly went to the Maharshi's hall. Bhagavan, as Maharshi is universally called here, was reclining on a sofa surrounded by a low, wooden barrier to distance the worshippers from touching him. Close to the couch was an incense burner, which was going on all the time. There was one more burner containing incense sticks. The purifying smoke was rising in the air.

People were coming and going out after prostrating before the Maharshi. But all this homage left him untouched, or was it only my illusion, for those wonderful eyes seemed to take in everything even though they had a faraway, distant look.

Prayers from the Upanishads were being recited by three young disciples. I felt the magnificent rhythm of the Sanskrit language more powerfully than I had ever felt before. The recitation was wonderful, the intonation accomplished and 'egoless', making one immediately hushed to devout silence.

I felt that I was face to face with a Reality which has transcended all that I had dreamt of him. Here was a great sage whose *darshan* was undoubtedly a privilege. I instinctively felt that here was India at its highest, for here was the deepest realization of the Reality transcending all mundane factors and bringing peace which surpasses all understanding. We were in a world totally different from the one we had left behind.

We attended the evening prayer on the eve of our departure. There could be no farewell, for Bhagavan's presence would never be forgotten. As we were bidding farewell to the Ashram, a friend said that we could not possibly leave without taking Bhagavan's permission. We reached Bhagavan as he was coming out of the dining hall. Our reward was immense. Bhagavan gave us a penetrating glance of immeasurable

grace, which even now, is one of the most abiding memories of our sacred pilgrimage. **It is astonishing how Bhagavan's presence and his usual, apparently routine activities cast such a magic spell over all those who are blessed to come near him.**

121

Madhavi Ammal was a sincere lady devotee who wrested *diksha* from Sri Ramana.

I knew fully well that Bhagavan gave no formal initiation, but I kept on asking for it whenever an opportunity presented itself. Invariably Bhagavan used to reply, "Who is the Guru and who is the *sishya* [Disciple]? They are not two. There is but One Reality. It is in you and it can neither be given nor taken." [1]

On March 12, 1934 I went to the hall. Only the attendant Madhava Swami was there. When I made my usual request Bhagavan laid aside the newspaper he was reading and sat in *padmasana*, quite absorbed. I then recited a hymn of praise to the guru in Telugu and also *Akshar-amanamalai.*[2]

Bhagavan turned to Madhava Swami and said, "She has prayed to Sri Arunachala." This struck me as meaning that Sri Arunachala will give the initiation and also that Bhagavan and Sri Arunachala are not two. Bhagavan resumed his state of absorption and I had my persistent request for *upadesa.* But he continued to sit motionless. Finally, I begged of him, "Am I not a competent person to receive *upadesa*? Bhagavan should himself tell me about this."

Immediately on speaking thus, I found a bright light emanating from Bhagavan's face, and the effulgence filled the whole hall. I could not see Bhagavan's body but only the brilliance. I shed tears in profusion. The whole incident lasted for a few seconds. I prostrated to Bhagavan. There was a smile on his face but no movement otherwise. After a while he turned to me as if to ask, "Have you got rid of your mania?" He then took a piece of paper, wrote a *sloka* on it and gave it to me saying, "You can make use of it in meditation." The *sloka* was: "I adore Guha the Dweller in the Cave of the Heart, the Son of the Protector of the Universe, the pure light of Awareness beyond thought, the wielder of the weapon of *jnana sakti* and the Remover of ignorance of blemishless devotees."

1. It is of interest here to note Sri Ramana's response to Brunton's request, made in 1930, to accept him as a disciple. Brunton writes: "In my heart I know that I come as one seeking to take up the position of a disciple, and that there will be no rest for my mind until I hear the Maharshi's decision. I put my request briefly and bluntly. He continues to smile at me but says nothing. I repeat my question with some emphasis. There is another protracted pause, but at length he answers me, disdaining to call for the services of an interpreter and expresses himself directly in English. 'What is all this talk of masters and disciples? All these differences exist only from the disciple's standpoint. To the one who has realised the true Self there is neither master nor disciple. Such a one regards all people with equal eye.' I am slightly conscious of an initial rebuff, and though I press my request in other ways, the Maharshi refuses to yield on the point. But in the end he does say, 'You must find the Master within you, within your spiritual self. You must regard his body in the same way that he himself regards it, the body is not the true self'. " *A Search in Secret India*, chapter xiv.
2. One hundred and eight hymns on Arunachala by Sri Ramana, *refer* p.425.

122

Dr. Shankar Rao, a retired District Medical Officer, attended on Sri Ramana almost from the start of his illness.

To have served Bhagavan as a doctor is no ordinary privilege and no ordinary experience. It was an education of the highest type, a training of a unique character. It provided me with vivid glimpses into the human as well as the superhuman and god-like personality of Sri Maharshi.

When I first came to the Ashram in December 1948, Bhagavan had a small nodule under the skin above the elbow. It was removed in February 1949. A microscopic examination revealed it to be a malignant tumour of the flesh. The wound did not heal and after a few days a new growth appeared.The tumour subsided a little as a result of radium treatment, but it again began to grow. In August, the tumour was removed with the help of surgeons from Madras. In December 1949, a small nodule again appeared in the middle of the arm which was operated. By the middle of February 1950, the tumour again started growing. All treatment, including homeopathic and ayurvedic failed. The general health of Bhagavan continued to deteriorate and the end came on April 14, 1950.

Bhagavan's attitude towards his body was one of complete detachment. Disease and pain left no impression on his mind. If he allowed himself to he treated for the ailment, it was more because his devotees wanted it than because he desired relief. His attitude was always of supreme indifference to bodily ailments. To everyone by his side, the way he bore the pain, which was at times extremely excruciating, without showing signs of suffering on his face, was a wonder.

One of my friends took photographs of Sri Bhagavan one afternoon. During the night when we both were together and I was dressing the wound, he referred to the photos and gave a profound spiritual discourse using the science of photography as an illustration. He said, "For taking a picture the silver salts are coated over a film in the dark and when the film is exposed in the camera, you get an impression caused by light outside. If the film is exposed to light before you put it in the camera there can be no impression on it. So is it with our *jiva*. When it is still in darkness, impression can be made on it by the little light that leaks in. But when the light of knowledge has already flooded it, no impressions of external objects can be obtained." In a similar fashion, he used to entertain his medical attendants with jokes interspersed with profound spiritual education.

To watch Bhagavan and listen even to his day-to-day talk was an education to those who were near him. There was no need to read books on religion or philosophy. His whole philosophy and the philosophy of ages were in Bhagavan's life. His life was an exposition of the highest philosophy.

123

Emmanuel Sorensen (Sunya Baba), a Danish devotee, was once referred to by Sri Ramana as 'a natural born mystic'. He visited the Ashram many times during 1936-46. Most of his life was spent living in an ashram near Almora in Uttaranchal.

In 1929, when in England, Rabindranath Tagore, invited me to India. He discerned in the simpleton's Being a quality of Sunya-Santi-Silence and intuitive awareness, which was felt to be congenial and appreciated in India. The invitation gave me the needed push or pull to venture forth simply and solitarily in India, and the proposed 3 or 4 months stay stretched into 45 years of Himalayan *ananda* – grace. The solitary pilgrim in Consciousness had come 'Home.' In India I read the Vedas, the Upanishads and the writings of genuine Masters.

I heard of Sri Ramana Maharshi while in Kashmir and Tibet from Lamas, and later from Paul Brunton [No.1] and Dr.W.Y.Evans-Wentz[1]. After spending several years in the Himalayas, I came to Sri Ramana the Maharshi in 1936 and was introduced to him by Paul Brunton. I also came three times or more later at a few years' interval. But the first *darshan* of the Maharshi remains an unforgettable experience, especially Sri Ramana's casual, as it were, statement, "We are always aware," and this made a most powerful impact on me. It resounded in my consciousness like a chime and continued to linger in my memory like a mantra or echo. I also remember some passages mentioned by him from the Bible: "I am that I am", "Be still and know that I am God", "Know ye not that you are God."

I found Ramana Maharshi's was a pure Advaita experience, and his chief language was radiant silence, to which only mature souls familiar with solitude could easily respond. When Sri Ramana was questioned by officious officials and was later asked if it had tired him, he said, "No; I did not use my mind!" He was mind-free and ego-free.[2]

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1. He was professor of philosophy at the University of Oxford, England.
2. The reference seems to be to questions put to Sri Ramana by the Commission which came to the Ashram in 1936 to interrogate him in regard to dispute over the ownership of the Ashram property. For details *refer* David Godman's *Living By The Words Of Bhagavan*, pp.136-43.

124

Lokamma was a kitchen worker at the Ashram.

I happened to meet Thenamma (a kitchen help at the Ashram), who had been to Sri Ramanasramam. Her accounts of Sri Ramana's life and teachings ignited in me a longing to visit him. My family members were dead against my going there and this began to affect my health. At last, the long-denied consent was given and I went to the Ashram with a group of pilgrims.

By a mere look, Bhagavan transmitted his power. I could feel it coursing through my veins. With eyes brimming with tears of happiness, I kept looking at Bhagavan, who asked Muruganar, "Is she the one about whom Thenamma was talking?"After a week, while returning, I said, "Bhagavan, I have none to call mine except you. Please bless me so that I

may always remain in your proximity." Just then Muruganar came in and Bhagavan asked him to read out *Upadesa Saaram* to me. I begged for a copy, which I got.

Gradually, I became a regular visitor. I used to assist in the kitchen. One day I was to cook some *dhal* and curry. I came early in the morning so as to have some more time. But Bhagavan was quicker than me. He told me that the *dhal* was ready and I have to prepare only the curry. Bhagavan asked Thenamma what she was doing, and finding that she was preparing special food for a lady having her menses, he got annoyed and said, "Why should she eat food cooked separately? Make no differences, serve her the food you have prepared for all."

After the evening meal, Bhagavan asked me whether the lady was given the common food. As I was assuring him about it, the Ashram manager came near and told me in whispers that in case someone else asked me what food was served to ladies during their period I should say that separate food is prepared for them. Bhagavan overheard the manager and scolded him, "Why do you ask her to tell lies? The Ashram gives food to all and makes no difference. There are no untouchables here. Those who do not like it may eat elsewhere."

He went on to add, "There used to be the same trouble with Mother at the Skandasram. Here we have menses and there we had pariahs. She would not give food to the man who brought us firewood because she was afraid of pollution! She insisted that I must eat first, then she would eat and then the woodcutter could have the remnants left on the ground outside the Ashram. I refused to eat until the man had been decently fed. At first she would not yield and would suffer, weep and and even go without food. But I was adamant; and she had to reconcile to my standpoint. What is the difference between man and man? Is it not correct to see God in all?"

We were all astounded. The rebuke, addressed to the manager, went deep into our hearts.

125

Raja (V.Rajasubrahmania) Iyer was the first postmaster at Sri Ramanasramam.

My mother and elder sister had the utmost reverence for Bhagavan. In the first few years after Bhagavan's arrival at Arunachala, they would not miss the opportunity of offering food to him.

I first met Bhagavan in 1911. Thereafter I used to go and see him every now and then. From 1935 onwards, I began to stay permanently at the Ashram. The circumstances under which I became a permanent inmate are interesting. One day, I had a dream in which I saw Bhagavan ordering me to pull the punkah overhead. I obeyed him with great joy. During my next visit Bhagavan looked up as soon as I had prostrated and asked me to pull the punkah. This was surprising and I connected it immediately to my dream. I pulled the punkah joyously for a while, when Bhagavan asked me to stop. By this Bhagavan had gently drawn me to his service.

The rule was that the inmates should do some work in return for the permission to stay in the Ashram. I was assigned the job of making *iddlies*. The grinding involved in the process was difficult. Bhagavan sometimes would give useful tips to make it easy. Often Bhagavan would work with us side by side, cutting vegetables, etc. He was very particular about avoiding waste. He showed me how to use a ladle to avoid spilling while pouring, and how to start a fire with just a few drops of kerosene.

In 1937, Sri Ramanasramam post office was opened and I was appointed the first postmaster. Prior to that I used to bring post from the town. Bhagavan humorously remarked, "Yesterday's postman is today's postmaster."

Bhagavan used to wake up at four in the morning. Till nine at night there would be a continuous stream of visitors and his solicitude for each of them was touching. To provide some relief, the management decided to close the the doors of the hall for two hours after lunch. When Bhagavan learnt about it, he sat outside the hall after lunch saying that people come to see him from long distances; they may have some other urgent work. The management was welcome to close the doors but he was free to meet the visitors outside. It took a lot of persuasion to make Bhagavan relent.

126

Roda MacIver (*nee* Kamdin) hailed from a well-to-do Parsee family of Bombay.

I first heard about Bhagavan in 1940 from Mrs.Taleyarkhan, a well-known devotee. She gave me some books and photos and told me that the Maharshi was a very great man. I could not understand the books

but I was strongly moved by the photos. I felt an urge to go and see the Maharshi and as time passed the urge became stronger and stronger. There was no specific reason for this urge; my position in Bombay was good, both financially and socially, but somehow I was not satisfied. I felt restless, eager to break off, and anxious to move on. And I did so in 1942.

The time I arrived at the Ashram, the Maharshi had gone up the hill. I was told to wait on the footpath for his return. I was expecting to see a man walking down the hill, but **when the Maharshi finally appeared, I couldn't believe that I was watching a glorious sunrise unfold: a distant glimmering of light that, as it approached, became more and more radiant until the blazing sun itself was standing next to me. I was overawed and humbled by this display of utter magnificence.** Standing in the glow of that radiant presence, something shifted inside me, some new awareness manifested that I had never had before. I was caught by him and his love, and in that moment my soul became his.

During the next two years I was visiting the Ashram regularly. One day in 1944 when I went into the hall, Bhagavan was reading some papers. I sat down and looked at him. Suddenly he put away the papers and turned his luminous eyes on me. I could not stand the gaze, so I closed my eyes, tears streaming down my face. When I opened my eyes he was still looking at me. My heart got flooded with joy and inner calmness!

Next morning, when I was in the hall somebody asked Bhagavan what was the use of sitting before him, if he does not give initiation? Bhagavan replied that initiation can be given in three ways: 'by silence', 'by look', and 'by touch.' When saying, 'by look', he looked at me. Then I had no doubt that I had received initiation from Bhagavan, my most revered Master!

After a month's stay when I returned to Bombay, there was a complete change in my life. Worldly pleasures ceased to attract me and I wanted to be alone as much as possible. I decided to leave Bombay and settle down at Tiruvannamalai, but did not know where to stay. But I knew Bhagavan was guiding me and so I did not worry much. And it so happened that two days before leaving Bombay I met my husband to be.[1] He told me to go and stay in his house in Tiruvannamalai and so I left happily. Soon after, with Bhagavan's blessings, we got married at Sri Ramanasramam. Bhagavan showed visible interest in the proceedings.

From the beginning, I had a strong desire to touch Bhagavan's feet, but I knew this was not allowed by his attendants. I confided this

desire to Mrs.Taleyarkhan, thinking she would keep it a secret. But in the hall, in front of everyone, she told Bhagavan, "Roda has a strong desire to touch your feet." I was so embarrassed. Bhagavan said nothing at the time; but after lunch that day, he stopped near me, said something in Tamil to a nearby devotee and asked him to translate it for me. The devotee said, "Bhagavan says, why should she want to touch my feet? My feet are always on her head." I was overwhelmed with joy. Everyone around congratulated me on my good fortune on getting a blessing like this. People who had been with Bhagavan for years and years said they had never heard him make a remark like this to anyone else.

One day I was feeling some mental agony while sitting in front of Sri Bhagavan. He took out an unburnt charcoal from the urn and said, "Do not burn your mind. Keep the mind as fresh and clean as this coal." From that time onwards I gave up worrying over any problem.

Once two visitors came to Bhagavan. One of them addressing Bhagavan said, "My friend has taken as his guru a man who is not even a *sadhu*. To show him what a *sadguru* should be, I have brought him here." Bhagavan replied sternly, "Who are you to say who is the right guru for him? By what power can you make out what a man really is? In fact, the guru is not as important as the disciple himself. If one worships with utmost devotion, even a stone would become the Supreme Lord."

Once I thought what Bhagavan needed was a pretty silver box for the nuts he kept for his birds and squirrel friends. The little tin box he had was old and ugly. No sooner had the thought crossed my mind than someone brought a silver box as I had in mind and offered it to Bhagavan. Bhagavan exclaimed, "A silver box! No. Please take it back. What have I to do with silver boxes?" While saying this, he looked at me as if to say, 'The same would have happened to you and to your silver box!'

Maurice Frydman [No.36] once brought a glass of orange juice to Bhagavan, who remarked, "Is that all? It will not be enough", adding after a pause, "for everyone!" Frydman said that he had brought it only for him as his health was declining. However, Bhagavan would not even touch it. Anything, not shared by all was like poison to him.

Attendant Krishnaswami would beat monkeys who played mischief in the hall or tried to stealthily take away the fruits. Once Bhagavan told him, "It is not the monkeys that are receiving your beatings. It is I. The suffering is mine." When some devotees complained to Bhagavan about their trouble with the monkeys, he said, "All this land was once a jungle in which the monkeys could roam about freely. It has been their natural habitat

for centuries. We are trespassers. Is it fair to complain? Why not put up with a little inconvenience."

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1. David MacIver, the person with whom Arthur Osborne's family had stayed in the early forties. *See* first para of no.40, p. 95.

127

Meenakshi was the wife of Muruganar, an outstanding devotee of Sri Ramana and a great poet (no. 53).

Though my marriage was celebrated in a grand manner, I hardly had any married life worth the name. Soon after my marriage, my father left home and became a permanent inmate of Sri Ramanasramam and lived as Dandapani Swami. My husband who was a Tamil teacher in a Mission School got a copy of *Aksharamanamalai* from my father. After reading it he left home and reached Sri Ramanasramam and got totally absorbed in Bhagavan. When I reached there, I found him and yet did not find him for he was now wholly of Bhagavan, and point blank refused to accept me as his wife. Yet I stayed at the Ashram.

In those days, the Ashram comprised just two cottages set in the most picturesque surroundings. There was the backdrop of the Arunachala hill in all its majesty. Bhagavan would do the cooking and I would assist him. The inmates were only about ten and we would literally feast on Bhagavan. Sri Ramana would teach me some new Tamil devotional song each day, and make me recite it the next day to ensure that I had learnt the same properly.

One day while all were meditating, my thoughts strayed. I started wishing for a cup of coffee. Bhagavan knew everyone's thoughts. He said, "While everyone is meditating on the Self, Meenakshi is meditating on coffee." Just then Manavasi Ramaswami Iyer [No.94] arrived with *iddlies* and coffee for all of us. Bhagavan jokingly said, "Meenakshi's *tapas* has borne fruit, please serve her first."

After being abandoned by Muruganar, who would not take me as wife even after Bhagavan's intervention, one day I wept bitterly before Bhagavan. He asked, "Did anyone chide you?" "No Bhagavan, I was only cursing my fate." With a heart brimming with love he said, "Meenakshi,

why don't you have faith in my words? What is there in the family life of which you are so enamoured? My protection is always there for you".

128

Nagaiah V. Chittoor was a legendary Telugu cine artiste. Known for his films *Bhakta Pothana* and *Bhakta Thyagaraja*, he visited Sri Ramana in the 1930s.

When my wife died, the whole world looked bleak to me. Everything seemed like an arid desert with no oasis in sight. I would be reading the *Gita* over and over again. The slightest thought of my wife would sink me into deep sorrow. To overcome it I would let my friends force me into giving music concerts.

One day I left my house, and wandering here and there, reached Sri Ramanasramam. To me it was like entering the heaven on earth. The atmosphere of profound peace which surrounded the Maharshi and which enveloped the place sank into me. At long last, my mind knew some rest. The majestic silence of Bhagavan ended my suffering and my self-concern about the bereavement.

Paul Brunton [No.1] and I became friends, and time passed happily. One day a friend from Chittoor spotted me and cajoled me into accepting a recording programme for his film. I told him that unless the Maharshi gave his consent, I would not budge. I had not spoken a single word to Bhagavan all this while nor had he to me. But there was some imperceptible yet strong bond of love between us. To leave the majestic master who filled my heart with peace was unthinkable. Still the seeds of desire had been sown. I was looking for an opportunity to get the Maharshi's permission. When the permission was sought, he said, "Yes, you can go. There is still a lot of work for you to do." I could not comprehend the implications of the statement at that time. The recording assignment took me to the film world where name and fame came to me in a big way.

I would have withered away unhonoured and unsung but for the grace of Bhagavan Ramana. He poured new life into me. The Maharshi had an uncanny perception of each person's need and would lead one along the path best suited to that person.

129

Padma Sitapati was daughter of Janaki Matha of Tanjore, a well-known mystic and a great devotee of Sri Ramana.

My mother had instilled deep love and reverence for Bhagavan in me. I had visited Bhagavan innumerable times since my childhood days.

My three-year-old son Janakiramana developed high fever and lost his eyesight. It was a tragedy we could not bear. My mother came to my house and said, "Don't be afraid. The God of gods and protector of our family, Sri Ramana, will restore the eyesight." These soothing words did not sink in. Yet out of regard for my mother, I wrote a letter to Bhagavan explaining my predicament and seeking his intervention. A reply came: "By the Grace of Sri Bhagavan child Janakiramana's eyesight will be fully restored."

My father Dr. Ganapati Iyer was with us treating my son. As the months rolled by our faith, except that of my mother, faltered in the face of the stark reality. We began to question her 'blind faith'.

It was the day of Karthikai Deepam.[1] My mother performed an elaborate *pooja*. As she came out of the *pooja* room she said, "Padma, Sri Ramana, our Sri Ramana has restored your son's eyesight. Take him to Siva's temple this evening." Half-heartedly we went to the temple. To our amazement and abundant joy my son prattled, "Amma! I see Bhagavan before my eyes. I can see." Tears of joy streamed down my cheeks.

My mother ordered us to go to Ramanasramam to express our gratitude to Bhagavan. Bhagavan was seated on the sofa when we entered the hall. He listened to the whole story as if he had no part at all in restoring the eyesight. This was Bhagavan's way; he would never take credit for his miracles.

In the evening, I again went into the hall and sat near Bhagavan. As it became dark my son said, "Amma, I can see only Bhagavan's body, not his face." Bhagavan heard this and questioned me. I had to tell him that even though my son could now see clearly during the day, he still suffered partial night blindness. Bhagavan looked at my son and told him, "Ramana, look at me properly. You can see Bhagavan's head." By saying this, he completed the miracle wrought by him. My son could see Bhagavan fully, clearly and normally. His night blindness too got cured.

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1. *Refer* annexure-II, p. 411.

130

Swami Pranavananda (S.Narasimham before *sannyasa),* uncle of Dr. S.Radhakrishnan, former President of India, was a *munshi* in Police Training College and taught local languages to Europeans. Among others, he wrote *Ramana Maharshi Charitramu, Sri Ramana Stutipaatalu* and *Sri Guru-Anugraha Avataramu.* He was the first to translate *Who am I?* into Telugu.

Once I came to the Ashram from Gudivada [Andhra Pradesh]. Bhagavan asked me in a tone brimming with affection whether Kallaturi Seetharamaiah was all right. "Who is he?" I asked. "Dr. Kallaturi Seetharamaiah", said Bhagavan with emphasis and gave a detailed description about him. I was overwhelmed at the thought of his love and consideration for the devotees. This person had visited Bhagavan only once or twice earlier. He was not the one to talk freely with Bhagavan; he would only offer his respects and sit quietly in a corner.

A fortnight before Bhagavan's *mahanirvana* we were all having his *darshan* by filing past him in a queue. The *sarvadhikari* told me, "Bhagavan is looking at you intensely and you can take liberties with him. A doctor, Kaviraj, has been sent from Calcutta by Sri Rajendra Babu specially to treat Bhagavan. Kindly recommend the doctor to him." Accordingly, I made the request. Bhagavan said, "Will anyone preserve after the dinner the leaf on which he has eaten?" I then realised that this body is like a leaf. When the purpose for which the body has taken shape is over, it will have to be thrown away as a leaf on which the food has been taken.

T.R.Kanakammal in her book* Cherished Memories *records:

One day, Bhagavan was sitting in the verandah with some devotees. Suddenly a wounded crow flew in at great speed and fell at Bhagavan's feet, who picked it up and stroked it gently. When the crow died in his hand, Bhagavan said, "Some *siddha purusha* has left his body today", and gave instruction for entombing the crow.[1] Pranavananda who was on the scene broke into tears and said, "Bhagavan, did you not grant liberation to Jatayu in the last *yuga?*[2] Now you have done the same for a crow." Hearing this, the devotees were moved by Pranavananda's devotion to Bhagavan, who himself looked on silently as though he accepted everything.

1 The tomb of the crow is on the northern side of the compound near the old hall.
2. Reference is to the famous episode of Jatayu in the *Ramayana.*

131

T.R. Rajagopal was a devotee from Vijayawada (Andhra Pradesh).

My financial affairs were a mess in 1947 due to losses in business. Friends, relatives and even my wife cold-shouldered me. I realised that in the last analysis one is really alone in life.

During this time of distress, in July 1947, I had a vivid dream in which a sage with divine effulgence appeared and assured me of his protection. I could identify him as Ramana Maharshi because I had seen his picture in *The Sunday Times*. I could give no credence to the dream. After all, I had not even visited him. Why should he care for me, an utter stranger? Who was this Rajagopal to him? I kept pushing away the urge to go to him, and resisted the pull of his luminous eyes. In the end he won.

On November 30, 1947 I left Vijayawada for Sri Ramanasramam. I did not have a single paisa. I ate whatever was given to me on the way and reached Bhagavan's presence on December 10. It was eight in the morning. Joy swelled in my heart as he gave me a piercing look. We exchanged glances, but I had to close my eyes as I was unable to bear the power of Bhagavan's eyes. I completely surrendered myself at his feet. A new confidence surged within me. I was certain that Bhagavan would protect me.

I returned and made earnest efforts to get a job. On February 19, 1948, while walking on Abids Road, Hyderabad, I came across my old friend Cheruvu Parthasarathi who was Chief Accountant in A.P. Electricity Dept. To my surprise, he made affectionate enquiries and got me a job in Sirpur Paper Mills Ltd. on a salary of five hundred rupees per month. I settled down comfortably at Sirpur, Kagaznagar, Andhra Pradesh. Is it possible to explain the mystery of Sri Ramana's protection? Why should he care? Yet he came into my life in a forlorn hour and made it beautiful beyond compare.

132

Santanam Iyengar was headmaster in a high school in Tanjore. He served as an accountant at the Ashram after retirement.

Till thirty second year of my life, I knew nothing about God or Guru or Liberation. All of a sudden a complete change took place. I lost all taste for worldly goals. I could see clearly their worthlessness. I felt that the only thing that mattered was to attain the Self, since *atman* and God alone are eternal.

After sometime I happened to read Swami Ramtirtha's booklet *The True Atma*. That set me thinking. Don't the scriptures emphasize the need for a *sadguru* for attaining Self-knowledge? Where could I find such a *sadguru*? I knew only one recourse and that was to pray to Sri Rama, my chosen deity. I prayed, "Oh Lord, please lead me to a *sadguru* who is blemishless like you."

One night I had a rapturous dream. I saw two cottages surrounded by a forest situated in front of a hill. In one of the cottages a divine person was seated in *samadhi*. I heard a voice urging me to go there saying, "He is Ramana Maharshi, a true *jnani* for whom you have been yearning."

This dream made such a strong impression on me that at the earliest I proceeded to Tiruvannamalai to surrender at the feet of Sri Ramana. Wonder of wonders, what I saw before my eyes was the exact reproduction of my dream. Bright stars formed a halo behind Sri Ramana's head. This convinced me that there was no difference between 'Rama' and 'Ramana', a conclusion which has been with me ever since.[1]

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1. It is of interest to note that Sri Ramana himself has confirmed that the words 'Rama' and 'Ramana' are one and the same. *Refer* p. 91, para 3.

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Prof. Sista Subba Rao (1909-1980) taught English at the Hindu College, Machhlipatnam, Andhra Pradesh. He wrote his reminiscences in Telugu and later in English.

I first came to know of Bhagavan in early 1936 from Ramarao

Panthulu, my first guide on the spiritual path. He related an incident at the Ashram which convinced me of the mysterious powers of Bhagavan. A cobra crawled into a room. Several people gathered together and were trying to drive it out when Bhagavan came upon the scene. He addressed the serpent and said, "Please move away, these people are frightened by your presence." The serpent at once went out. Panthulu suggested that I might get cured of the problem of my failing eyesight, if I sought Bhagavan's blessings.

On June 3, 1936, I prostrated before Bhagavan and gave an account of my situation. Bhagavan remarked that my outer sight would be all right if and when I would get my inner sight. I did not understand and requested him to clarify. His answer was, "Not to have outer sight is to have inner sight." I then begged him to enlighten me on the subject of developing the inner sight and he did so. This was a turning point in my life. My failing sight was my obsession till that moment. But the Maharshi's *upadesa* brought about a change in my outlook. From that time, the question of improving my sight receded in the background and I started in right earnest my *sadhana* for getting the inner eye opened.

One evening, I had a peculiar experience during meditation. My breath became long and sonorous till it resembled the hissing of a serpent. My body became light and my hands, which were on my thighs, started dangling in the air. I felt every particle of my body virbrating and experienced a sort of inexpressible bliss. I did not however lose outer consciousness. This perculiar experience of mine soon attracted the attention of those seated in the hall. My wife was asked to bring some water that was sprinkled on my face. After a while, my body and my breathing came back to normal. I came out of the hall and went home. After my departure, the devotees seemed to have asked Bhagavan what the matter was with me. Bhagavan seemed to have replied that I was unable to contain the intensity of the *sadhana* within and so I became externalized. This I was told when I came to the Ashram next morning.

Inspite of our extremely frugal life, my finances were running out short. There was absolutely no sign of improvement in my physical sight. On the other hand, the vision was gradually deteriorating. The prospects appeared very gloomy. There was every likelihood of the complete loss of eyesight. How then am I to eke out my livelihood? Further, I had a dependent in my wife. Thoughts of suicide often pressed themselves on me. There were many ponds around and on the hill. We could under the cover of darkness, easily drown ourselves in any of them.

I thought of presenting the facts to Bhagavan and beg him for a solution; but courage failed me. For one thing, Bhagavan always sat in the hall surrounded by a number of devotees; there was no privacy where I could meet him. Secondly, I was hesitant to worry Bhagavan with my personal worldly problems. But there was no alternative. One afternoon, I wrote out on a piece of paper an account of my financial, physical and mental condition and prayed for his grace. I handed over the paper to him and stood near him. He read it through and gave it back to me, but said nothing. I resumed my seat.

Soon there was a change in my outlook on life. I said to myself, 'Suffering is the result of sinful deeds in the present or past life and everyone must pay for his misdeeds, for every action has its own reaction. By putting an end to the present life, we are adding interest to the principal. Our past sins are the principal, while the suicide will be its interest. All *karmic* debts are to be cleared to the last penny. It is cowardice to try to escape from the hard facts of life.' This changed attitude towards life put an end to all thoughts of suicide that thronged the mind previously. I became a changed person, ready to fight out the battle of life at all costs and under all circumstances.

This incident gave me an inkling into the ways of the *mahatmas*. They do not usually work physical or material miracles, but bring about miraculous changes in the mental condition of the devotees.

A few days before Bhagavan's *jayanti* in 1940 or 1941, I had a sort of inspiration to compose a Sanskrit verse on Bhagavan. I did so and sent it to the *sarvadhikari* of the Ashram. In reply he said that the verse was read out on the *jayanti* day and was greatly appreciated by the devotees. The verse was: "Dwelling on the slopes of Arunachala, Sri Ramana, the Sun of Wisdom and Embodiment of Bliss, taught *atma vidya* effortlessly. I continually think of this matchless and measureless Guru."

Sometime later, I saw Bhagavan in a dream seated on an elevated place like a throne. His body was shining like molten gold. Standing before him, I requested for my eyesight. He replied "That is not possible by me, you may have to go to someone else." The dream ended.

My brother, a devotee, was an advocate. His clientele was very limited. He wanted to shift his practice to another place in expectation of better luck. He sought Bhagavan's opinion about it. Bhagavan replied softly, "Is that so? Why don't you consult an astrologer about it?" We could not help laughing.

A devotee complained, "I am unable to have peace of mind. I am planning to go to the Himalayas in search of it." Bhagavan said, "You have travelled 250 miles from Madurai and come here. How much mental quietness have you got? Multiply it by the distance from here to the Himalayas to measure the happiness you would get by going there." Even the questioner could not help laughing.

In reply to a visitor who remarked, "I have had enough of these family troubles, my only recourse is *sannyasa"*, Bhagavan observed, "Now you are crying over domestic worries; then you will have your share of *sannyasi's* problems. Mere change of clothes would not help. Find out the one for whom there is sorrow."

Once I sought Bhagavan's blessings on the ground that all my efforts to abide at the source of the mind had proved futile. When Bhagavan asked, "What is the obstruction?" I answered, "It is my deep-rooted tendencies. I need your grace." His reply was, "Your repeated effort is bound to erase them. All *sadhana* is meant for this purpose only." He further observed, "Keep up your practice. There is no need to remind God about His business which is to keep an eye always on our welfare. The mistake one is prone to make is to abandon effort under the mistaken impression that God's grace is absent. But one should not slacken, for God's grace is bound to operate at the ripe time."

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Mahapatra Dave, born in 1915 at Mahaboobnagar, Andhra Pradesh, was a teacher at the Gujarati School, Secunderabad.

G. V. Rajeswara Rao, one of the founding members of Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad, who knew Dave closely, writes:

Having a religious bent of mind from the very beginning, when Dave read *Who am I?* in 1939, he concluded that Sri Ramana was his guru. He longed to have his *darshan.* The opportunity came only in 1943, when the father of one of Dave's students requested him to take his son on some sort of a tour to broaden his horizon. The father agreed that the journey could be to Tiruvannamalai. Bhagavan thus provided him the badly needed money, which came in the way of his undertaking the journey earlier.

When Dave went to the hall and sat before Bhagavan, all questions

he wanted to ask were answered in silence. Suddenly he felt as if someone was twisting the right side of his heart. There were no more questions, no more doubts; it was only bliss – he surrendered himself to Bhagavan. After about a month's stay, Dave returned home happily having realized his cherished desire. After this Dave could manage to visit the Ashram every six months or so despite his slender purse. To allay the fear of his parents that Dave may become a *sadhu* by such frequent visits, he started taking his wife with him.

Dave started the Ramana Meditation Centre which came to be known as *Ramana Bhakta Mandali.* This was the first Ramana group in Hyderabad. Numerous devotees, including Dr. K. Subrahmanian [No. 33], Prof. Sista Subba Rao [No.133] and Prof. Shiva Mohan Lal [No.156] participated in the *satsangs*, which were held on Thursday evenings at Dave's house. The *Mandali* also brought out a publication *Ramanasthuthi* in 1956.

Dave used to mention many incidents through which Bhagavan's grace manifested for him:

Dave's mother was prone to arthritis. He asked her to apply with faith the ash which fell from the burning of incense sticks placed before Bhagavan's portrait. She did so and got rid of her disease. Having developed faith in Bhagavan, she went to the Ashram with her son in 1945. After being introduced to Bhagavan by Dave, she sat in the hall. She very much wanted to ask Bhagavan to better their financial position and improve Dave's health, which was always poor. But once before Bhagavan, she forgot everything and realised that things happened according to one's *prarabdha*.

Being a great devotee of Lord Krishna, she prayed to Bhagavan to bless her with His *darshan*. Suddenly she found the people and Bhagavan disappearing before her eyes in the hall and Krishna appearing with his resplendent face. She was thrilled. Next day she prayed for *darshan* of Sri Rama and goddess Lakshmi both of whom appeared before her in all their splendour, and after a while merged into a round ball of light, which got set in her heart. She was overjoyed and became an ardent devotee of Bhagavan.

Dave and Prof. Shiva Mohan Lal wanted to go to the Ashram for the Golden Jubilee Celebrations in September 1946. They got held up at Vellore due to a bus strike. The function was scheduled for the next day, and fifty miles were to be covered. When Prof. Lal proposed to walk the

distance, Dave asked, "What about the luggage?" A little later, a military truck came to the lodge where they were staying (from where, nobody knows) and took them to the outskirts of Tiruvannamalai. They could reach the Ashram on time for the Celebrations.

Dave's father had no faith in Bhagavan. Dave's prayers were heard when due to the Razakar oppression, the Hindus were fleeing Hyderabad. The family decided to shift to Tiruvannamalai. Two months' stay at the Ashram made Dave's father a devotee of Bhagavan.

In 1946, when the Gujarati School management, Secunderabad (where Dave taught), got sore on his being on leave too often, he resigned. Immediately thereafter he got an offer from a printing press in Secunderabad to work as manager; the new management agreeing to all his conditions. Here Gujarati translation of the *Upadesa Saaram* was printed.

Once, when Dave was having his meals at the Ashram's dining hall, Bhagavan asked the server to give him some groundnut preparation saying that it was good for his health. But relying on his medical knowledge that groundnuts were not good for asthmatic patients like him, he took only a little of what was served to him and passed on the rest to his wife. He always regretted that had he eaten the preparation fully, he would have got cured of his asthma.

Dave remembered the day he gave a helping hand to Bhagavan when he was about to fall near the old guest house. Bhagavan said, "Leave it." When he asked the attendants as to why they did not help him, they replied that they have been forbidden. Dave recalled that though Bhagavan's body was constantly exposed to sun and weather, it was very soft and tender.

Dave got an accountant's job with the Saurashtra government in 1947. In 1949, when he heard of Bhagavan's illness he wanted to go to Tiruvannamalai. When the superior officer refused leave, he went on a fast and got 15 days leave. He went to the Ashram in September 1949. Later on he resigned his job and was there till Bhagavan's *mahanirvana.* On the fateful April 14, 1950, he and his wife were reciting *Akshara-manamalai* and *bhajans* throughout the night.

Dave had bought a piece of land in Tiruvannamalai to stay near the Ashram. As he could not stay there after Bhagavan's *mahanirvana*, the site was given by him to Natesan, who had served as Bhagavan's barber for 22 years.

Dave used to say: **"Bhagavan was not a person who knew *Brahman*. Where is the knower and where is the known? He was *Brahman* Himself."**

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Subbalakshmi was the wife of Dr. M.R. Krishnamurthi Iyer (no. 155).

My husband, Dr. Krishnamurthi, the first Ashram doctor, met Bhagavan in 1924. During one of the Deepam festivals[1] he introduced me to him. In the early days of my married life, while living in Tiruvannamalai, my husband (who worked in a hospital) would often run away to Bhagavan, leaving me all alone. He never thought about the children or me. One day, I was terribly afraid that my husband might become a *sadhu*. The next night Bhagavan appeared in a dream and assured me, "Have no fear; your husband knows where his duties lie. Give up all worries." When my husband narrated the dream to Bhagavan, he gave a gracious smile!

One day all of a sudden, I became extremely unwell. Neighbours and friends felt that I was nearing my end. At that time my husband was at the Ashram. When the message was sent to the Ashram about my condition, Bhagavan, who was reading the newspaper at that time, went into a trance for some time. Simultaneously, I became normal. This was nothing short of a miracle. Later, when I met Bhagavan, he mischievously told me, "It seems it is a new life for you."

Once Bhagavan was narrating the life of the saint Siruthondar Naayanaar. His voice was choked with emotion and tears kept trickling from his eyes. No doubt he was a *jnani* par excellence but what a heart he had![2]

Bhagavan used to refer to my husband as the 'town doctor'. He enquired about him even on his *mahanirvana* day. I could not get Bhagavan's *darshan* on that day because of the long queue. Bhagavan, however, graciously appeared in a dream and said, "Amma, how long should I bear the body? Death is natural to it. It is like a leaf on which the food has been eaten. It has to be thrown away."

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1. *Refer* annexture-II, p. 411.
2. *Refer* paras 3, 4, & 5, p. 286, when Sri Ramana got emotional and ecstatic while telling the story of Kannappan Naayanaar.

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Vajreswari was daughter of an outstanding Sri Ramana devotee, Ganapati Muni, a renowned Sanskrit scholar and poet (no. 91).

My mother used to swallow *vibhuti* (sacred ash) endlessly. All our efforts to wean her away from that habit were in vain. She too wanted to get out of it but could not. She could take liberties with Bhagavan. She would regard him as her father and he in turn would treat her like a child. **The real secret is that Bhagavan's attitude towards us would correspond to ours towards him.**

One day my mother told Bhagavan about this habit of hers and sought his help to get over it. Bhagavan said, "Why did you not tell me about this earlier? All right, taste this *vibhuti.*" What a strange remedy! Yet it worked. From then on my mother completely got rid of her habit.

Once a devotee brought her dead son in a box and prayed intensely to Bhagavan to bring him back to life. Bhagavan could readily see the faith and hope behind her prayer. Tenderly he told her, "Amma, don't you see that if I restore your son's life, Sri Ramanasramam would be flooded with corpses?" Then he spoke to her at length about life, death and the need to be conscious of the state transcending both. He explained that all experiences were centred round the individual and that the search for the source of the 'I' alone would end all sufferings. These soothing words and advice went home and the lady returned, consoled at heart. This was only natural since Bhagavan's words were loaded with power and grace.

After the lady left, a devotee asked, "Is it possible to revive the dead?" Bhagavan replied, "*Jnanis, siddhas* and *yogis* can restore life, but is it for this purpose that they have come?"

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Kundalmal A. Mahatani belonged to Karachi (now in Pakistan). After his first visit in 1944, he was a regular visitor to the Ashram. *Day by Day with Bhagavan* contains answers to many questions put by him to Sri Ramana.

I had the good fortune to hear about Bhagavan for the first time in 1942, through a friend who lent me Brunton's *A Search in Secret India*

[No.1]. I was extremely impressed when I learnt that such a great sage as Bhagavan, did exist in our land. I ordered all books containing Bhagavan's teachings and after having gone through them found the teachings profound and easy to grasp. A great longing arose in me to have his *darshan*, but I could visit the Ashram only in January 1944. In the meantime, whatever doubts I had while reading the books I used to get them cleared through letters to the Ashram.

I enjoyed Bhagavan's presence for eleven months at a stretch. After that I used to go to the Ashram every winter and stay three to four months at a time till Bhagavan's *mahanirvana* in April 1950. From the point of view of the onlookers, he appeared to be suffering. When many devotees lamented over his ailment, he laughed and said, "They have not yet realised that I am not the body and that I am not going anywhere."

To me Bhagavan is more than all other gods or prophets so far incarnated on this earth, such as Rama, Krishna, the Buddha, Christ, Muhammad, Nanak and others. I have only read and heard about them and cannot have proper conceptions of them. Even the numerous pictures of them are only imaginary and naturally different from one another. Therefore, it is impossible to have an exact conception of any of them. On the other hand, I have seen Bhagavan and therefore I have a very clear conception of an ideal to meditate upon.

In my humble opinion, Bhagavan was a *jivanmukta*. Many have heard and read a great deal about the state of a *jivanmukta*, but he actually demostrated that state of being above body-consciousness.

Even now I feel his presence just as before, when I see his large photo on the couch in the old hall. It is as if he is sitting there just as usual, with a smiling face and a compassionate look, with the only difference that now he does not talk but is in *mounam*.

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Santha Rangachary was a journalist. She also served on the editorial board of *The Mountain Path* during 1980-88.

I desperately needed a confidante, an adviser, somebody preferably outside the family, and out of the blue the name of Ramana Maharshi came to me. His was the only name I had ever heard my father – a

stubborn, intolerant sceptic – mention without any adverse suffixes. I decided, therefore, to write to the sage asking him directly: "Please, I beg of you, help me with my temper problem." Within a week I received a reply signed by the *sarvadhikari*, containing the Maharshi's message that if I myself made a constant and earnest effort to overcome my temper I would rid myself of it, and that he sends me his blessings.

My first reaction to that letter was one of astonishment at being treated like a grown up, since I had always been told what to do, guided, instructed, warned but never challenged except on a Sports Day. And here was this great Guru telling me: "It is your temper, isn't it? So, you yourself deal with it." He had simply batted the ball back to my court in the nicest possible way by treating me as an individual in my own right. I rather liked that.

Ramana Maharshi entered my life again a year or so later when my sister took our family on a pilgrimage.We were to stay at Sri Ramanasramam only for two days. But as it turned out, we stayed for the whole week and I wept like a lost child when we had to leave. The visit was a shattering experience for me. I do believe I literally fell in love with Ramana Maharshi. I was in a daze, a trance, my tongue was gone, my mind was gone, I was in a state of dumbfounded ecstasy. This love, which had been awakened, was the kind which totally bypasses the physical plane and creates an awareness of a different kind of consciousness which can only be described as a mindless rapture, pure joy. It is an unlocated, pervasive state of being sparked off by some kind of recognition and it stays with you, and you are never the same again.

When we went to Sri Ramana's hall, my mother, brother and sister went ahead and quickly disappeared into the hall. I hung back, unaccountably apprehensive. Then, as I at last composed myself and got to the door and looked in, I saw reclining on a sofa, a golden-brown figure with the most radiant countenance I had ever seen before or since and, as I stood there riveted to the spot, the Maharshi looked at me. When I remember it even now, more than forty years later, tears come to my eyes as they did then. I stood there, God knows how long, just looking at that face. Then, as in a trance, I moved forward deliberately towards him and touched his feet. Fighting my way through the disapproving glance that followed, as devotees were not allowed to touch Bhagavan, I made my way to a place near the window.

Once seated, I let my tears flow. I remember I spent a good part of that morning wiping my eyes. They were not tears of grief nor were

they tears of joy. Maybe they were for something which I saw in the Maharshi fleetingly and which I also want and shall forever seek. Yes, I cried for myself then and I still do it now.

Never before had I seen in a human countenance a more intense, inward life and yet one which remained so transparent and childlike. There was about him an irresistible and indefinable spiritual power, which simply overwhelmed me. I was conscious of people sitting all around me but was totally incurious about them. After an hour or so of silence I suddenly felt like singing. Without hesitation or embarrassment, I lifted my 12 year-old voice in a rendition of Tyagaraja's *Ninne kori Yunnanura,* keeping time softly with my fingers on my knee. After a few minutes, I threw myself with another gush of abandon into *Thelisi Rama Chintana*. As I began the *anupallavi* which exhorts the mind to stay still for a moment and realise the true essence of the name of Rama, I saw the Maharashi turn his eyes upon me with that impersonal yet arresting look of his, my heart soared and I thought: 'I want to be here for ever and ever'.

For three hours every morning and every evening my vigil in the hall continued for seven days. I sat in my seat near the window, still and thought-free, just gazing at the Maharshi. Occasionally somebody would ask a question and the Maharshi would turn and look at him, and you got the feeling that the question had been answered. Or, somebody would ask for the meaning of a particular phrase in a Sanskrit or Tamil stanza and the Maharshi would answer softly, briefly.

The Maharshi was not a man of many words. His long years of practised detachment from people made him absolutely brief in speech. His knowledge of classical Tamil religious literature was considerable; he could himself compose verses and he did. His enlightenment had not been directed by a Guru but had come from his Self-consciousness. His most effective form of communication was intra-personal through the sense of sight and the medium of silence. He was very much a human being, who laughed and joked occasionally, but he could suddenly plunge deep into himself while sitting in a hall full of people and rest in that stillness of spirit, which as he himself said, was being in God.

One afternoon, somebody showed the Maharshi some verses. The Maharshi read them and made a brief comment. In those eloquent silences that punctuated his brief remarks, one seemed to feel unspoken thought flowing around the room touching and drawing everybody into its illuminating course. That was a strange experience to me. **In the presence**

of the Maharshi, speech seemed redundant. I was totally and blissfully satisfied just being in his presence.

That whole week I practically did nothing else but sit in the hall. I had never before spent so many days talking so little, just sitting around so much, or so lost in a single-minded pursuit of the Maharshi.

I shall not claim that my whole life was transformed after this meeting. No. I went back to school and then to college, got married, set up a house, had children, started a journalistic career of my own. My *grihastasram* became my main preoccupation. But my visit to Sri Ramanasramam had done something to me. It left a mark on my mind and heart. The picture of the Ashram and of the Maharshi was always in my mind like the background curtain of a stage. Whenever I was tired or dispirited or perplexed, the wish to go to Sri Ramanasramam would possess me like hunger. Even when I was so busy that I did not know whether I was coming or going, a sudden look at a picture of the Maharshi hanging on the wall would momentarily root me to the spot and my mind would suddenly go blank.

Whenever I feel I want to go away somewhere, away from home, family, friends, books, mistakes, fears, sorrows, my mind automatically turns to Sri Ramanasramam.[1] And my body follows. I make the journey to Tiruvannmalai, walk into the Ashram, enter the hall, and I am 'home' and totally at peace.

Every human being has really only one guru like one mother. Some are fortunate enough to meet their gurus; some pass them by, like ships in the night. I stumbled upon mine when I was twelve; I now stand alone in myself. In a sense I am twelve-going-on thirteen all over again, standing on another threshold, remembering, waiting.

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1. Dr. Paul Brunton expresses the same feeling when he says: I have travelled in many lands but always my thought turned towards Tiruvannamalai as the Muhammedan turns his face towards Mecca. I knew that somewhere in the wilderness of this world there was a sacred place for me. *The Silent Power*, Sri Ramanasramam, p.76.

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T.R.A. Narayana was manager in a large British firm in Madras. He heard of Sri Ramana during a train journey in 1948.

I was on a tour of small towns. As Parthasarathi, my assistant, and I were boarding the train at Villupuram to go to Tiruvannamalai, we noticed a young man trying to enter the compartment. He was so fat that he heaved his bulky body this way and that, while another man on the platform, obviously his servant, pushed him in through the door.

When the train had run for some minutes, the man came to us and introduced himself as Ratilal Premchand Shah of Gondal [Gujarat], the only son of a rich merchant of the place.

Cursed with so much fat in his body from his tenth year, now at twenty five, he was a huge mass of flesh and misery. He told us that while he was asleep at night, he saw an ascetic smiling and beckoning him. This persisted for a long time, and stood clearly before his mental eye after he woke up. Two days later his wife was reading a Gujarati magazine. Looking over her shoulders he saw the picture of the ascetic he had seen in his vision. He came to know that the ascetic was Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. He at once went to his father and arranged for his journey to Tiruvannamalai with the trusted family servant. He felt sure that his suffering would end as soon as he reached Bhagavan; the smile and the beckoning in his vision by Bhagavan had given him that firm faith.

Parthasarathi had seen Bhagavan many times before and had also read a good deal about him. He and Ratilal talked about Bhagavan during the whole two-hour journey. I was apparently reading an English novel but heard their conversation with interest and attention.

About 5 p.m. on that day, when Parthasarathi and I entered the Ashram, we came to the verandah where about fifty people including Ratilal and his servant were sitting. Bhagavan was not on his couch. After waiting for some ten minutes and finding that Bhagavan had not come to his seat, Parthasarathi suggested that we could in the meantime go around and see the *goshala* and other places in the Ashram.

While returning from our brief tour of the Ashram, we heard a child like voice say "*Chee, asatthe!*" (Fie, you creature!). We observed movement among the leaves of the brinjal, lady's finger and other plants in the kitchen garden. Looking more intently, we saw a small goat, a little monkey and a squirrel and Bhagavan who was sitting on his haunches with his legs folded up to his breast. Bhagavan was holding a small paper packet in his left hand and was picking groundnuts from it with his right-hand fingers to feed the goat, the monkey and the squirrel and himself, by turns. His remarks appeared to have been addressed to the monkey, which had tried to snatch the nut he was going to place between the squirrel's

lips. As we watched, the four companions went on enjoying the eating. All the four seemed to be equally happy; the way they looked at one another and kept close together was touching. We saw all the four only as good friends despite the differences in their forms. No words could describe the feelings which passed through my being at the sight.

The nuts over, Bhagavan threw the paper away and said: "*Pongoda!*" (Go away, you fellows!), just as any old man speaking to his grandchildren. The goat, the monkey and the squirrel left and Bhagavan got up. We hurried away, feeling guilty of trespassing into the Divine, but not sorry.

Soon after, Bhagavan came to his couch. His eyes were fixed on something far above and beyond anything on earth. They were like screens which shut the material world off from the light which was burning behind them. Sparks of light shot out through the fibres of the screen at times, sparks which cooled the eyes on which they fell, pierced the gross coverages and lighted the wick inside them.

Bhagavan reclined on the pillow on the couch, supporting his head on his left palm. We all sat down to look at his face. We sat and sat, and looked and looked. **No one spoke or made any noise. But the confrontation was not a dead silence; it was a very live experience in which the innermost being of each one of us communed with the Supreme Consciousness which was Bhagavan.**

My mind kept recalling that scene: how the goat had snuggled to Bhagavan's breast in perfect confidence in his love for it; how the monkey had grinned in joy and how Bhagavan had returned the grin as both bit the nut; how the squirrel had peered with its pinhead eyes into Bhagavan's dream-laden ones and scratched his nose tenderly with its tiny paw. The vision of the Supreme Spirit underlying and overlaying the sense perception was spiced with the lovely sight of the groundnut party in the kitchen garden.

Bhagavan got up from the couch. We also got up. It seemed tacitly understood that we were to leave. We left. I felt a hitherto unknown peace and joy inside me; the faces of the others also showed a similar condition.

I saw Ratilal and his servant get into their bullock cart at the Ashram gate. There was a new spring in Ratilal's movements. Bhagavan's promise in the vision appeared to be moving in the right direction.

In 1953, I was in Rajkot staying in a lodge. One day, while in the dining hall, a man of about thirty accosted me, "Don't you recognise me. I am Ratilal of Gondal. You remember the *darshan* of Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi, five years ago." I looked at the man again. He was thin but strong.

His face glowed with health and happiness. I shook his hand heartily. He spoke again, "Sri Bhagavan fulfilled his promise wonderfully well. I am now managing our family business. I have a son two years old."

My mind went back to the kitchen garden and the four friends at the groundnut party.

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K.R.K. Murthi, B.E. (Elec.) was Chief Electrical Engineer, Electricity Dept., Government of Andhra Pradesh. He authored *Sri Ramana Bhagavan.*

Once in 1937, I read in a newspaper that an eminent personage was going to Tiruvannamalai to have *darshan* of Sri Ramana Maharshi. I had great respect for that gentleman and was anxious to meet him. So I made up my mind to proceed to Tiruvannamalai.

I went straight to the hall and placed the packet of sugar candy, which was purchased as an offering to the Maharshi on a stool near him and sat down along with a number of people of both sexes. All people were sitting like silent statues and the only offender in the gathering was the clock on the wall. Physical activity in the hall was nil but for the scented sticks, which were briskly throwing up curls of smoke. I waited patiently for sometime but still the same silence continued. It looked very strange and odd as I had never seen such a silent gathering before. I wanted to know something about the Maharshi, but whom to ask?

Several people were coming, prostrating before the Maharshi and sitting quiet in the hall. This was also an unfamiliar sight which left a deep impression on my mind. After a while, the Maharshi rose up and then everyone in the hall got up and prostrated. When the Maharshi left for a walk towards Arunachala hill people began to appear in their true colours and I witnessed the usual work-a-day world.

A visitor to the Ashram once told me that Sri Ramana simply sits quiet without talking and without doing anything useful to anybody. My personal experiences, which are very real, have convinced me that Bhagavan was always lending his helping hand actively and silently in his own characteristic way. He used to help the devotees so secretly that no one knew anything about it except the recipient.

Once, as I was entering the hall I saw the Maharshi holding his left hand forefinger with his right hand. There were several people in the hall at that time. Some might not have noticed this and some might have dismissed this as insignificant. But to me it is unforgettable because the pain I was for long experiencing in my left forefinger was permanently cured.

I was also cured of the pain in my elbow, which was persisting in spite of all medical attention. One day I dreamt Bhagavan taking meals at our house. After the meals I handed over a mug of water to him to wash hands. He took the mug and poured some water on my elbow before washing his hands. Next day onwards there was no pain in the elbow. If it had been a mere dream, could it have such an effect on the physical body?

Once arrangements were made for feeding the poor in the Ashram. People were rushing into the place set apart for dining. Then someone in authority told loudly that *sadhus* should keep out. When food was to be served, it was found that Bhagavan was not present. People rushed in all directions and found Bhagavan sitting under a tree. When requested to join the devotees, Bhagavan said, "You never wanted *sadhus* to remain there. Being a *sadhu* I left the place." Bhagavan identified himself with the lowest. He used to rectify the wrong not by showing anger but by self-denial or self-punishment.

The Ashram was developing a garden. Some inmates had put forth their best efforts to secure plants and nurse them. One day, some Ashram cows entered the garden and grazed off the inviting plants. The inmates were very unhappy. The event created much stir and reached Bhagavan's ears, who smiled and said, "Why should cows be blamed? Did they know they were not to graze in certain places? If the garden is properly fenced, the cows will not get in." Bhagavan saw the other side of things, which the normal people failed to see.

With a view to recording Bhagavan's voice, some devotees referred to the sound recording machines. Seeing that Bhagavan was favourably disposed towards them, they wanted to pursue the matter further and fix a date for recording the voice. At that moment Bhagavan said, "My real voice is silence. How can you record the same?"

Once Bhagavan was asked whether it was true that by the grace of the guru the highest state is reached in a moment. Bhagavan replied, "Yes. If the disciple is in a ripe state, the *ajnana* (ignorance) will be removed only by the *avalokana* (look) of the guru." He added, "The *kripa* (grace) flows towards one in proportion to one's merit. If the

vessel is small, the *kripa* received will be small; if the vessel is big, the *kripa* will be proportionately more."

Once an attendant of Bhagavan was reading some scriptures to him at night. The attendant heard a snoring sound and stopped reading. Immediately Bhagavan questioned him as to why he stopped. Again the attendant continued and similar snoring sounds from Bhagavan made him stop again. But Bhagavan was quite alert and asked him to continue.

One day a prince entered the hall with a few friends for Bhagavan's *darshan*. As there was no distinction between the prince and the peasant before Bhagavan, the prince took a seat beside us. One of his friends wanted to ask a question but was feeling shaky and hesitant. To his great surprise and amazement almost the same question was put to Bhagavan by someone else. Bhagavan's reply gave great joy to the visitor. The prince sat quietly for a time, and who knows what happened, he began to pour forth streams of tears till he left the hall.

Once, going through an English daily as usual, Bhagavan read somewhat aloud a sensational report of a new invention and smiled. After a pause he gently remarked, "One may acquire any number of powers, but without realising the *yathartha* (truth) one cannot acquire *mano shanti* (peace of mind). When someone asked, "What is *yathartha?"* Bhagavan replied, "That which exists always," and added after a pause, "Peace is our *swabhava* (nature). Just as a person who keeps a number of things in a room and complains that there is no space in the room, we say there is no peace. Is not the space obtained automatically when the things are removed?"

In the early days, the Ashram was a lonely cottage in a jungle. One day thieves broke into the Ashram at the dead of night. They freely used their sticks on everyone including Bhagavan, who restrained the devotees who tried to pay them back in the same coin. He said, "*Sahanam* (to tolerate) was *sadhu dharma*" and added, "Do we knock down the teeth if they bite the tongue?"[1]

Bhagavan told us: "If one wants to commit suicide, even a small implement or knife is sufficient. For murdering others, bigger things are required. Similarly, for oneself, one or two words are sufficient but to convince others, books after books have to be written."

When a Westerner invited Bhagavan's attention to the poverty of the average Indian and his poorly furnished quarters, Bhagavan replied that although the Indians did not possess many material comforts, they are not less happy on that account; as they do not feel the want of the same, they are able to enjoy life with what they have.[2]

Bhagavan's handwriting was just like print. I had a keen desire to preserve something written by Bhagavan. But I was feeling very hesitant to ask in front of so many persons.Then, someone in the hall remarked loudly that I had written in Telugu script the songs of Tamil saint Tayumanavar as selected by Bhagavan. Now Bhagavan wanted to see them. Asking me to handover the notebook, he patiently corrected some mistakes. In this way, he satisfied my burning desire, even before I expressed it, and without appearing to have done a special favour to me.

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1. Dr. Paul Brunton in *A Search in Secret India* says: " The Sage not only bore their attack patiently, but requested them to take meal before they departed. He actually offered them some food. He had no hatred towards them in his heart. He let them escape freely, but within a year they were caught while committing another crime elsewhere and received stiff sentences of penal servitude."
2. Prof. Galbraith, a former U.S. ambassador to India, has observed: "Indian villagers are rich in their poverty."

141

Srimat Puragra Parampanthi, a renowned swami of his time, has authored many books including *Advaita and Modern Physics, The Cardinal Doctrines of Hinduism* and *The Meaning and Mystery of Reincarnation.*

I saw Sri Ramana for the first time on December 10, 1949. I saw a tall, lean man in loincloth; the limbs were well proportioned and well knit and long; the skin was smooth and glowing and the quivering head was inclined towards the right side. There was a white bandage on the left arm, which had been operated upon to remove a tumour. His eyes shone with kindness and love, his face was lit up with a beatific smile of benediction. I saw before me **a yogi of the highest order – a mystic of the supreme realisation, who radiated the living presence of divinity within and without.**

The next morning I saw him again. His ever-smiling face was completely free from the ravages of illness, which was slowly and steadily ruining his body. **His spiritual presence was dynamic and clearly perceptible. It touched and inspired us and simultaneously took us**

to the high and rare sphere of spirituality. I felt suddenly the presence of a spiritual power, which was ambient and edifying and which raised the expectancy of all to a high pitch. The atmosphere of the hall was distinctly attuned to a higher will and power which influenced the entire gathering.

All eyes were fixed on the Maharshi. I wanted to know how and by what irresistible force it had been possible for persons – young and old, rich and poor, wise and simple, belonging to different races and religions – to gather at the feet of this great yogi. I wanted to know how and why the stubborn diversity has transformed into unity here – the persistent dissimilarity into perfect harmony – the 'many-ness' into oneness!.

I realised that it had been possible solely due to the unifying presence of the Maharshi. He was not only the preacher of truths of unity and oneness, of identity of man and God, of spiritual brotherhood of mankind – irrespective of caste or creed, race or position – he was the living symbol of these truths.That was why his all-embracing personality had become the centre of universal truth and the unifying force cementing diverse races and religions into a harmonious concord.

Our narrow understanding cannot fully comprehend him; his greatness is too vast – too immense to be captured within our mental orbit. Just a part of his spiritual self, a tiny fraction of it is visible to us and we rejoice in the partial vision of him because we are in the dark and bound by the sad limitations of our senses.

He has passed away, yet he lives perpetually in the evergreen memory of his thousands of devotees the world over, in his own undying gospels and messages which will continue to uplift, inspire and guide all along the right path towards the right and highest goal – God-realisation.

142

K. Arunachalam, a Gandhian social worker, hailed from Madurai. He served as chairman of the Madurai Khadi Board.

In the summer of 1932, I was working with a group of young men in the slums of Bangalore. I had been to my village in Madurai district and was returning to Bangalore to resume my work in the Gandhi School run by the Deena Seva Sangh. On my way back, as suggested by a friend, I stopped at Tiruvannamalai to have Ramana Maharshi's

darshan. I reached the Ashram and went to the hall where the Maharshi was seated on a sofa. In a corner of the hall, on the top of a cupboard, I saw an eighteen-inch statue of Mahatma Gandhi. I sat in front of the Maharshi along with several others in meditation. A few were reading silently some religious literature.The Maharshi himself was in *samadhi*. Some were reciting *slokas* in a soft melodious tone. On the whole, the atmosphere was an elevating one.

I sat in silence for hours together. When it was time for the night meal, all the devotees got up and walked towards the adjoining dining hall. I also went with them. After the meal some of us went back to the hall. I decided to sleep in the hall as some others did. I could not sleep because I was inquisitive to know what the Maharshi would do.

He got up from the sofa at 3 O'clock in the morning and walked towards the pond. After the essential morning routine he had a dip in the pond. He changed his *kaupina* (loincloth) and washing the used one, let it dry outside. Then he walked back to the hall and reclined on the sofa. After sometime, he got up, went to the kitchen and joined the group that was cutting vegetables. He supervised the breakfast and ate with the visitors and Ashramites.

During the daytime there was a stream of visitors who prostrated before the Maharshi. Sometimes he opened his eyes and blessed them with a smile. Occasionally he spoke a few words. When the daily newspaper arrived, he glanced through its pages. Most of the time his eyes remained half closed. There was a calm peace in the whole environment that surpassed all understanding. I sat silently watching and enjoying the holy presence of the Maharshi and spent a full three-day period like this.

Before leaving, I asked the Maharshi whom to follow. He enquired about what I was doing. I gave him an idea of the slum-settlement work in Bangalore and told him how we were engaged in *harijan* uplift and prohibition work. He blessed the work and asked me to continue it in the manner in which Mahatma Gandhi wanted such work done. I asked the Maharshi for his autograph. He did not agree but he wanted the *sarvadhikari* who was standing nearby to write my name.When I gave him my name without initial, the *sarvadhikari* asked my father's name. The Maharshi immediately said,"How can Arunachala have a father?" And he laughed.

I requested the Maharshi to clear a doubt of mine. He showed his willingness by a broad smile. Taking courage, I posed the following problem: "The Maharshi by his example directs his followers to keep quiet, but

Mahatma Gandhi whose statue is here, by his own example, goads everyone to be continuously active."The Maharshi's face broadened with an unparalleled smile. He asked, "Who told you that I am sitting quiet?" I replied in all humility that I had seen it with my own eyes. He said, "Why do you think that what you are seeing with your physical eyes is the truth?" I had no answer for this question. I took leave of him and left for Bangalore.

In 1951-52, during my tour of the southern United States I came in touch with a group of Whites who were deeply involved in the desegregation movement. They did not differentiate between one and another whether black or white. I found in the study room of the leader of this group a photo of Ramana Maharshi, whom he had never seen. He revealed that it was the Maharshi's teaching that was a driving force in all his activities undertaken for bringing about equality between the two races – the Whites and the Coloured. He evinced a deep interest in the Maharshi's mode of self-enquiry for self-realisation. Now I understood the true import of the *Gita's* teaching: "He who sees inaction in action and action in inaction is wise among men; he is a yogi who has accomplished all action."

143

Panthulu Lakshmi Narayana Sastri was a scholar and adept in composing extempore poetry.

In 1943, a close relative asked me to translate into Telugu, Ganapati Muni's Sanskrit work *Uma Sahasram*. I at once agreed. This was the first time I saw Bhagavan's picture, and it drew me like a magnet. During the 1946 summer vacation of the college where I served, my wife and I set out on a pilgrimage to Tiruvannamalai.

As we entered the hall, the Veda *parayana* was going on. Bhagavan was seated majestically on the sofa. His first sight evoked great faith and ineffable bliss in my heart. I was so moved that as Bhagavan rose for breakfast I could not restrain myself and fell prostrate at his feet. In the process, all the books which I had brought to present to Bhagavan fell on the floor. A devotee picked them up and helped me to go to the dining room. After breakfast I went to my lodging and composed twenty verses in Sanskrit in praise of Bhagavan under the title *Atmabhista Nivedanam.*

When I entered the hall again, I introduced myself to Bhagavan in Sanskrit, not knowing that he spoke Telugu. When I said, "*Uma Sahasram maya Andhrikritham*" (I have rendered *Uma Sahasram* into Telugu), he replied, "Oh, you are translating *Uma Sahasram* into Telugu", and even corrected my use of the word *Andhrikritham*. Bhagavan somehow knew that I had not finished the work, and when he enquired how far I had gone with my translation, I confessed that I had translated only a hundred *slokas*. Then I requested him to permit me to read out the poem I had composed in my room. Bhagavan nodded his consent and I recited the verses with a strong emotional fervour.

On the third day, I had the fortune of reading out the *Uma Sahasram* which I had translated, and informed Bhagavan that I had written to the publishers of the Sanskrit original for permission to publish the translation, and was awaiting their reply. Bhagavan advised, "If you meet Kapali Sastri in Pondicherry, he will help in obtaining the necessary permission."

While talking to Devaraja Mudaliar [No.35] I told him about my inability to go to Pondicherry as I had taken a vow for a pilgrimage to Chidambaram, and that if I went there, my finances would not permit a visit to Pondicherry.

After reaching Chidambaram, I accommodated myself in a pilgrims' lodge. All the time I was spending money very thriftily in view of my meagre finances. While talking to the steward of the pilgrims' lodge, I told him of my visit to Bhagavan and how I was unable to follow his instruction to go to Pondicherry. He told me that a visit to Pondicherry would not cost much and convinced me to extend my journey. He even accompanied me to the bus station and voluntarily purchased a ticket for me out of his own pocket.

I arrived at Pondicherry on May 10, 1946, and went to see Kapali Sastri. I introduced myself in Sanskrit and presented him with a copy of my *Andhra Dhyanyalokam*. In the afternoon I read out to him my translation of *Uma Sahasram*. He listened carefully and commended my translation and felt it was faithful and lucid. He promised he would do whatever was necessary to get my work published. When I was about to leave, he gently said, "As I am staying alone without my family, I am unable to offer hospitality to you, so you must kindly accept at least this." So saying he forced five rupees into my hands. In retrospect, calculating the additional expenditure on the trip to Pondicherry, I found to my surprise that it had cost me only five rupees extra!

Before leaving, Kapali Sastri told me that I would be passing through Tiruvannamalai on my way back to Vijayanagaram. I had not realised this before and was elated at the prospect of seeing Bhagavan again.

As I was about to enter the Ashram, I saw some devotees near the gate, one of whom was telling the others, "Sastriji is now coming from Pondicherry." I was surprised that they knew of my unexpected change of route. I went up to them and asked how they knew I had been to Pondicherry. I was told that after I had left for Chidambaram, one of the devotees told Bhagavan about my departure. He had then replied: "He will go to Chidambaram, from there to Pondicherry, and then come back here. He will leave for Vijayanagaram only after giving us a performance of his extempore poetry."

At the Ashram, the devotees asked for a performance of my poetry; the subject chosen was Bhagavan. When I started composing poems, I felt as if some divine force had taken possession of me. An advocate from Guntur jotted down the poems, twenty in all, while the recitation was going on. When the recitation was over, he gave me the paper, requesting me to fill in the blank spaces. I told him that the poems came to my lips spontaneously by Bhagavan's grace and I did not myself remember what I had said. Bhagavan also remarked, "Even if he tries, the original form cannot be recaptured."

Later, I was told that when Devaraja Mudaliar had said to Bhagavan, "It seems that Sastri is a great poet", Bhagavan replied, "Yes, I agree." But he was quick to add, "All this is only an activity of the mind. The more you exercise the mind and the more success you have in composing verses the less peace you have. What use is it to acquire such accomplishments if you don't acquire peace? But if you tell this to people, it does not appeal to them. As Ganapati Muni used to say, in going forward one can run with speed, but when it is going backwards, that is, running inwards, even one step is hard to take." When I came to learn about Bhagavan's opinion on the composition of extempore poetry, I greatly curtailed my poetic ambitions.

144

B. N. Datar, a famous philosopher, was based in Hubli, Karnataka. He has written books for the Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan.

During my 16 or 17 annual visits to the Ashram, I was generally a silent, though an observing member of the group of devotees that used to assemble to seek blessings from Bhagavan. I was, in particular, very keen on observing the attitude of various disciples towards Bhagavan and his response to them in his inimitable way.

Once a spiritual seeker from the West, highly perturbed over the then darkening clouds of the international situation (sometime before World War II) came to the hall in a challenging and quarrelsome mood. He almost took Bhagavan to task "for wasting his time and energies in a secluded corner of the earth, and not taking active steps to turn the world's attention from the ways of the devil to those of the divine."

His rebellious mood struck us dumb in the hall. He demanded an immediate answer from Bhagavan, who quietly told him that he would have it, and remained quiet without saying anything further. We were all sitting anxiously in the tense atmosphere when, after half an hour, quite suddenly, the questioner broke the silence by exclaiming that he had got the answer. Bhagavan asked him to write it. He did so, and when it was read out it breathed a sense of complete submission to Bhagavan. He confessed in the writing that **Bhagavan was serving the best interests of mankind in his own unobtrusive and silent ways, and that what was required from a seeker was not a mood of challenge but one of submission to the higher forces, which were working in their own inscrutable ways through great sages like the Saint of Arunachala.** The questioner, from that time onwards, became one of the gentlest of Bhagavan's devotees.

A few days before Bhagavan left this world, All India Radio at Dharwar had requested me to broadcast a short talk on the great personages that had influenced my life. I chose to speak on Bhagavan; my speech to be broadcast on a date to be fixed later. As destiny would have it, it was fixed for April 14, 1950, between 7.30 and 7.45 p.m. I went to Dharwar and gave the talk, and thus had the good fortune of broadcasting to the world my tributes just one hour before Bhagavan departed from this world. I treat this as the highest blessing from Bhagavan, and the greatest treasure of my life.

Even though Bhagavan is not with us in human form, I have never felt his absence because he is living in my house and before my eyes wherever I go. I experience that he is guiding every action of mine at every moment of my life.

145

Y. N. (alias Bhaurao) Athavale was one of the few Maharashtrian devotees of Sri Ramana. He used to sing Marathi *bhajans* before Sri Ramana in the hall.

Even before I had *darshan* of Bhagavan, I was brought up in a religious and spiritual atmosphere at home. From 1939 to 1942, I suffered from sciatica due to over exertion in my engineering work, and became very weak. I used to pray that I should have *darshan* of a great *mahatma* like the *swami* worshipped by my grandfather, and whose grace had done a lot of good to our family.

In February 1942, when I was in a state of utter depression, I had a wonderfully vivid vision-like dream at dawn. I saw in a mountain cave, a great *mahatma* and throngs of people going up the mountain to listen to him. I was one of them. I waited and asked the people around me, "How is it that the lecture has not started yet? Where is the Saint?" Near me sat an old man who raised his hand and said, "Silence is the Master's speech and his disciples have no doubts left." I asked, "Where is the Master?" He replied, "He is sitting near you." Searching near me, I found a slender young man wearing a white codpiece, with a smile on his face. I bowed to him and asked his name. Pointing a finger to his heart he said in Marathi, "This is known as Ramana Maharshi." Having said this he smiled in a charming manner and instantly I woke up in delight. I took it to be the answer to my repeated prayers and felt happy.

I had not heard much about Ramana Maharshi's greatness, as his name was not then (in 1942) well-known in Maharashtra. For about ten or twelve days I was longing to get some information about him. All of a sudden, one day a gentleman of my acquaintance told me that during his pilgrimage to Rameswaram he went to Tiruvannamalai and had a blissful *darshan* of Ramana Maharshi. He advised me to go. I reached Sri Ramanasramam at 6 a.m. I saw Bhagavan coming towards us. My joy knew no bounds. As I prostrated before him, he asked, "Have you come from Poona? You seem to be quite exhausted." I was wonderstruck to hear this.

In the afternoon, when I sat before him in the hall, he enquired about my health. I replied that I had been suffering terribly from sciatica for three years, had no sleep, no desire for food and was growing from bad

to worse in spite of the treatment by the best of doctors. He graciously said, "You can stay here in peace. Your disease is not incurable." He quoted a verse from the *Gita* (II.14): "O son of Kunti, the contacts between the senses and their objects, which give rise to the feelings of heat and cold, pleasure and pain, etc., are transitory and fleeting. O Arjuna, endure them," and pacified me. I felt extremely relieved. In three or four months I was completely cured of the disease. Thereafter, I used to see him three or four times a year up to 1950 and came in close contact with him. He rejuvenated me physically and spiritually and brought me eternally into the fold of his benign Grace, to describe which I have no words.

On receiving a telegram, I went to the Ashram on the day of his *mahasamadhi*. My emotions and feelings were checked somehow during the day he left the body. But next day, at night, I began to weep bitterly feeling very uneasy that I shall never henceforth see Bhagavan in an embodied form and enjoy the bliss of his presence. All of a sudden in the dead of night, some footsteps were heard and lo! There came Bhagavan with a lantern in his hand! He straightaway approached me, and said in a soft, gentle, loving voice, "Why do you weep? Did I not tell you that I am here?" I controlled myself and bowed down to him. By the time I raised my head, he had disappeared, leaving me in utter surprise and desolation. My thousand *pranams* to Ramana Bhagavan.

146

Dr. Haribhai M. Adalja was a disciple of Swami Madhavatirtha (no. 51).

In 1946, I went to Sri Ramanasramam for Bhagavan's *darshan*. Devotees were seated in the hall in front of Bhagavan. I wrote a chit and placed it before Bhagavan, stating, "I feel I have the experience of the Self, but my mind does not agree with that." After reading it, Bhagavan ordered a copy of *Ulladu Narpadu,* turned to verse 33 therein, and asked someone to show it to me. It read, "To speak I have not known myself or I have come to know myself is ridiculous. What? Are there two selves, one to objectify the other? The experience for all is that the Self is only One."

A year later, when I was coming down the Arunachala Hill and Bhagavan was going up the narrow path, I stepped aside to give him

room to go and stood with closed eyes and folded hands.When Bhagavan came near me, to my utter surprise, he asked, "Do you still find two?"

Once I asked Bhagavan, "If waking and dream states are not different, can a man realise his Self in the dream state?" He replied, "First realise the Self in the waking state and then raise the question."

Bhagavan was quoting an example of the relation of gold with the ornaments, that only gold is real, while the name and form of gold appearing as ornaments are unreal. I raised a query, "Though the ornament is false, we see gold and also the ornament which is false, which is not the case with the world, i.e.,when we see the world in numerous forms we do not see the Reality, the substratum." Bhagavan explained, "In dream there is no world, and yet you see it just as in the waking state. Both name and form are illusions; you see them only when you see yourself in form and identify yourself with the ego sense."

147

Sadhu Bramanian, earlier Dr.R. Subramanian, was Director of Public Health in Madras Government. He was instrumental in ensuring the best medical treatment during Sri Ramana's terminal illness.

One day, Dr. Anantanarayana Rao [No.88] brought a ripe guava to Bhagavan saying it was the first produce from his garden. Bhagavan asked for a knife, a plate and some chilli powder. He cut the fruit into small pieces, sprinkled the chilli powder over them, took a piece himself and asked the rest to be given to those around him. That was the only dish prepared by Bhagavan himself which I ever ate. It was also the most delicious morsel I ever tasted.

Once Bhagavan had a mild attack of jaundice. As a part of the treatment, his diet was reduced to bare buttermilk and rice. Dr. Shiva Rao of the Ashram dispensary felt that Bhagavan was getting weaker. He requested him to take some protein foods and vitamins, but he declined. I happened to be in the Ashram then. One day as Bhagavan came out of the bathroom, I prostrated before him and said, "Dr. Shiva Rao and others in the Ashram are very anxious about Bhagavan's health and want Bhagavan to take some protein foods and vitamins. At least for their satisfaction I request Bhagavan to agree." He smiled and said, "Yes, you may arrange whatever is necessary." I came and told this to Dr. Shiva Rao.

Vitamins were available in the Ashram dispensary, but not the protein food. I returned to Madras immediately and searched all prominent drug stores. Since it was wartime, drugs were scarce and the protein food was available only in one shop. I bought all the seven bottles available and took them to the Ashram. I went to the hall with one bottle and a spoon, and gave one spoonful to each of the few devotees present and then gave one to Bhagavan. He took it and asked what it was. I said that it was protein food and that he could mix one spoonful with the food thrice daily. He asked me to give the bottle to Sama Thatha with instructions. After a few days some overzealous devotee served two spoonfuls on his leaf-plate. He immediately stopped taking it and asked the bottles to be given to the dispensary for the use of the patients.

After his last operation, visitors were prohibited. But Bhagavan, despite doctors' instructions, insisted on lying outside the dispensary room, where he was operated. This he thought was necessary to save disappointment to the devotees many of whom were coming from distant places to have his *darshan.*

148

M.V. Krishnan was son of Munagala S. Venkataramiah, a famous devotee, who compiled the well-known volume *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi.*

On August 29, 1896, Venkataraman (later Sri Ramana) left Madurai for Tiruvannamalai. One week later, my father went home from Madurai to Sholavandan and told my grandmother that a Brahmin boy who was studying in Madurai at an adjoining school had run away from home. At that time he little realised that he was to meet this runaway boy and become his disciple, live in his close proximity from 1933 to 1950, and be the compiler of the classic *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi.*

In 1930, Dr. T.N. Krishnaswami [No.99] wanted to visit the Ashram and be with Bhagavan during the weekend. On the roadside he saw a woman selling the vegetable *kovai kai* and bought the lot (1½ kg.) for a few *annas*[1]. When Bhagavan saw the contents he said that if *kovai kai* were cooked with brinjals it would be tasty. The next morning a devotee arriving from Madras brought brinjals! The curry was cooked in the morning and all of us relished it.

In 1937, an elderly American came along with a group to visit Bhagavan. The trend of the discussion was that the five senses were to be kept under check. Since the old American was deaf he could not follow the discussions. Bhagavan remarked that the American needed to control only four senses as the fifth (hearing) was already under check. Someone in the Hall explained this to the American and he beamed with joy.

I went to Delhi in December 1940 in search of a job, but did not succeed till February 1941. My letter that I have to return, as no job was available, was shown to Bhagavan who went through it and said, "Let him stay on in Delhi." In March I got a job. From then on I prospered very well.

In the beginning, there was only a thatched roof over the Mother's *samadhi.* Devotees decided to build a hall, and bricks were carried to the site by the devotees. Bhagavan also wanted to work but the devotees would not permit him. One moonlit night, when all were asleep, a devotee woke up and saw Bhagavan bringing bricks to the site from the kiln opposite the Ashram.

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1. One *anna* was one-sixteenth of one rupee.

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N. Ponniah who lived in Malaysia happened to hear about Sri Ramana in 1938 when Sri Ramana's devoted disciple Ramana-padananda (no. 102) had visited Malaysia to disseminate Sri Ramana's Gospel. He visited the Ashram a decade later.

Only in 1948 the opportunity came for me to visit the Ashram. I was accommodated in the guesthouse. Devoid of all signs of so-called civilised standards, this thatched cottage entertained me with inexpressible homeliness in the company of resident *sadhus* and devoted visitors. Away from the din and bustle of city life, the Ashram is ideally situated in the midst of natural surroundings. There was no regimentation based on caste, creed or colour or of any other type. As a background to this model of ancient hermitages stood, in all its grandeur, the holy hill of Arunachala.

With a heightened reverential emotion, I entered the hall. Bhagavan was reclining on the sofa, absorbed in the Self, silent and serene. I took my place amongst the gathering. Pin-drop silence prevailed. **Nothing seemed more enjoyable in this blessed world than to sit in silence in that place in the holy presence of the Maharshi.** *Darshan* was not the

monopoly of human beings alone. At certain hours the squirrels from a large tree by the side came down to claim their fair share. The beautiful peacocks followed. Bhagavan looked at them most graciously. "Oh, you are hungry!" he would say, and some grain was given to them. They would then move away happily like a child after the mother's feeding!

One day a barrister from Bombay broke the silence by raising some puzzling questions, not capable of satisfactory answers. A discussion followed at a high intellectual level. When an impasse was reached, the Maharshi told the barrister about the futility of the theoretical enquiry. He suggested that he could sit in silence and introspect and he will find the answer. In the afternoon, the visitor said that he was clear on one point, but could not reconcile on some others. Bhagavan replied, "That is good, continue the analysis; answers to all questions would be found." Half an hour after the barrister had left, Bhagavan smiled and said, "He thought this is the Bombay court." Everybody enjoyed the observation. Vedic chantings concluded the day's programme.

***Darshan* of the Sage Ramana is a singular experience, which words can hardly describe. I can only say that I felt an unusual vibrating sensation, a sort of electric charge, which had transported me for a moment.** What is even more unforgettable are Bhagavan's melodious and inspiring expressions in Tamil, which often attuned to his Holy Hermitage, reverberate in my ears.

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Swami Satyananda was a personal attendant of Sri Ramana from 1946 till the Maharshi's *mahanirvana* in April 1950.

I was born in 1916 in Kerala. My mother being of a pious disposition used to serve *sadhus* and help them in various ways. Her piety made me turn to spiritual path when I was only eighteen. Once I went on a pilgrimage to Rameswaram in the company of some *sadhus*. On the way, we stayed at a *math* managed by one Narayanaswami. He spoke to me of the greatness of Bhagavan and gave me the address of the Ashram on a piece of paper.

From Rameswaram I went to Tiruvannamalai. When we arrived, Bhagavan was sitting in the hall alone. He looked at us and smiled. I can never forget that smile. I spent seven years at the Ashram, begging my food in the town. I then obtained, by Bhagavan's grace, the good fortune of serving him as his personal attendant.

On the evening of April 14, 1950, we were massaging Bhagavan's body. At about 5 p.m. he asked us to help him sit up. Precisely at that moment devotees started singing 'Arunachala Siva.'[1] When Bhagavan heard the singing, his face lit up with radiant joy. Tears began to flow from his eyes and continued to flow for a long time. I was wiping them from time to time. I was also giving him spoonfuls of water boiled with ginger. Bhagavan's breathing became gradually slower and slower and at 8.47 p.m. subsided quietly. There was no struggle, no spasm, none of the signs of death. At that very moment, devotees who were outside saw a bright meteor in the sky, which reached the summit of the holy hill Arunachala and disappeared high in the sky.

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1. The 108-verse poem addressed to mountain Arunachala. For details *refer* Aksharamanamalai under 'Books', p. 425.

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Henri Hartung (1921-88), a Swiss, ran a Ramana Centre in Switzerland for many years. His French translation of *Ulladu Naarpadu* went into several editions. Influenced by French philosopher Rene Guenon[1], he authored *Analogies of interest between Guenon and Ramana Maharshi.*

I came to Bhagavan in 1947. The long path to the Ashram became for me the royal road to the discovery of oneself. I had learnt that Ramana Maharshi was an authentic representative of the traditional wisdom. In Bombay I met a Brahmin who told me without astonishment as if it were an item of the everyday news, and even before greeting me, "I was waiting for you, I have to escort you to the Maharshi."

Two days and two nights of train travel followed. While admiring the Indian landscape and especially the noisy and colourful scenes, which occured during the stops, I tried to assess myself. Finally, I framed some ten questions that remained essential for me – the meaning of my presence on earth, what happens after death? Why? How? etc. I reached the Ashram.

During the next ten days, I shared the ritual life of the Ashram, sitting for hours in front of Sri Ramana in the meditation hall. On the day of my departure, precise answers to every one of the questions I had prepared

were given to me, without my asking them. Sometimes through a few words written by himself, sometimes through answers to questions, sometimes through some shared domestic chores, especially in the kitchen, most often in silence: all this being a really subtle transmission of an exceptional spiritual reality.

Till his last day, the Maharshi will make it possible for his visitors from the next town or from a remote place, on foot and penniless or in luxurious cars, to see him, even to talk to him. They came to bow in front of the living incarnation of the divine reality in human form. He was there, amongst us, without ever showing any sort of ambition, or a particle of pride. A smile of love and peace and the look which I feel while writing these lines can never be described in words.

Thirty years after the first meeting, I am once again at Tiruvannamalai, with my wife. A pilgrimage, which goes to the depths of my soul, as it did thirty years ago in 1947. The Maharshi's life serves as a concrete reference to our personal growth. He was the last link of a chain of wise and holy men whose origin is beyond time and whose influence gives a meaning to our life, a harmony to our behaviour and peace to our hearts.

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1. Another devotee of Sri Ramana who was influenced by Guenon was Arthur Osborne. *Refer* no.40, p.94.

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Swami Chidbhavananda was Head, Sri Ramakrishna Ashram, Ootacamund from 1926-1940.

In 1923, a few of us religiously inclined college students undertook a pilgrimage from Madras to Tiruvannamalai for a *darshan* of Ramana Maharshi. The Ashram was then in its initial stage. An august person was seated on a raised platform. Around him on the floor were seated a number of devotees, all intently looking at him. Silence reigned supreme. This was a novel experience for us.

We sat quietly. The Maharshi turned his penetrating gaze at us off and on. We felt ourselves highly blessed by his friendly and kindly look. Occasionally he spoke a word or two, which were always pertinent and to the point. But his silence was more eloquent.

As head of Sri Ramakrishna Ashram at Ootacamund, I took as many opportunities as possible to see the Maharshi. I was not inclined to talk much with him; **being seated in his presence was more than sufficient. Occasionally he spoke, but his silence was what I sought and prized every time I went to him.** A purified enquirer makes a rich harvest of the blissful calmness that prevails in his presence.

The Maharshi occupied a couch in a corner of a hall in the Ashram. One day a man following the path of devotion came in and occupied a place near the sage. Then he unburdened all that lay buried in his heart. His speech was choked with feeling. He poured forth, "I have gone on pilgrimage all over the land. I have been regular in my spiritual practices. Many a sleepless night I have passed in prayer. Still to this day I have had no mercy from the Lord. I am forlorn." He cried bitterly, but the Maharshi sat unconcerned. When all his suppressed feelings were worked out, in a measured voice the sage said, "What is there to sob about? Instead of being poised in the blissful Self, you go on wailing." This simple observation had a telling effect.The visitor saw that his problem was self-created; and a new chapter started in his life.

On another occasion, a talkative man made his appearance. He chose to sit near the sage and unceremoniously asked, "Bhagavan, what is your view on birth control?" There being no answer that man explained at length the importance of the topic. Again getting no reply, he continued until he could say no more and then fell silent. Silence reigned supreme in the hall. In the midst of this silence, the Maharshi asked, "Do you know death control?" There was no response.

One day it was suggested to the Maharshi that no spiritual progress could ever be made without *sadhana* or discipline. After a pause he made these observations: Mind binds man, and the same mind liberates him. Mind is constituted of *sankalpa* and *vikalpa* – desire and disposition. Desire shapes and governs disposition. Desire is of two kinds – the noble and the base. The base desires are lust and greed. Noble desires direct us towards enlightenment and emancipation. Base desires contaminate and cloud the understanding. *Sadhana* is easy for the aspirant who is endowed with noble desires. Calmness is the basis of spiritual progress. Plunge the purified mind into the Heart. Then the work is over. This is the essence of all spiritual discipline!

During one of my visits, I was seated at some distance from the Maharshi. I remembered his injunction, 'Plunge the purified mind

into the Heart', and decided to practise it then. **I gazed at him and he gazed back at me. What followed was indescribable. His body seemed a glass case from which a blissful brilliance streamed out.** More than half an hour passed this way. It was an experience unique and unforgettable. It confirmed Sri Ramakrishna's statement that spiritual experience can be transmitted from one person to another in the manner in which material things are handed over.

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C. R. Pattabhi Raman was a minister at the Centre. He was son of Sir C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, who was Dewan of Travancore.

My first meeting with Ramana Maharshi was in the early 1930s when I returned from England after my studies. I accompanied the young Maharaja of Travancore to Tiruvannamalai. The Maharshi was the same serene blissful self with a friendly and kindly look on his face.When the Maharaja asked him what the first step was for *atma vichara*, he said that the very fact that he had come to Tiruvannamalai was the first step for him.

The next important occasion when I went to Tiruvannamalai was a few days before the Maharshi's bodily demise. I accompanied my father, Dr. C.P. Ramaswami Aiyar, along with a friend. We were taken to the sage, who had been operated upon for a carcinomatous growth on his left arm. Apart from a few beads of perspiration on his forehead, there was nothing on his face to show that he was ill or suffering from pain. **He proved beyond doubt that pain or sorrow did not affect a realised soul. A leading civil surgeon from Vellore expressed great surprise that the sage did not even want anesthesia for the operation and yet was able to stand the pain and the shock.** Ramana Maharshi spoke a few words to my father and we took leave.

As we were getting ready for dinner, my father said to me that he did not want food and would have some milk. At that very moment an attendant ran to us with a message from the Maharshi, "The elderly person will say he will only have milk. Let him eat some fruits also." It was miraculous because the Maharshi was nearly half a furlong away and could not have heard what my father was saying.

The Maharshi was unique in many respects. Like Dattatreya of

the *puranas,* he did not have a guru as such. One could see on his face expressions of joy when recitations from the Vedas and Upanishads were taking place in the Ashram. His path of knowledge was not rigid or exclusive.

Sri Ramana did not seek to establish any new cult but showed the direct way to Self-realisation. He taught as a *jivanmukta* (liberated soul), exemplifying *Tat tvam asi* ('Thou art That' of the *Chhandogya Upanishad*). Like Suka of the *Bhagavatam*, he was characterised by *samatva* (sameness in joy and sorrow and freedom from duality).

He frequently referred to verses from the *Yoga Vashista* wherein the Sage Vashista advised the young Sri Rama to fulfil his mission as *avatara purusha*, all the while abiding in the Self. The ideal of Self-realisation is not visionary, but is the very goal of life. Unswerving abidance in the Self, the one eternal Truth, whatever one may be doing, is well described in the *Yoga Vashista*: Firmly established in the vision that shines forth/ On the renunciation of all desires, and rooted/ In your own Being as a *jivanmukta* / Act playfully in the world, Oh Raghava.

To have seen the Maharshi in flesh and blood and have heard his word is our great fortune and most treasured memory.

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Maha Krishna Swami who established 'Bhagavan Sri Ramanasramam' in Brazil, had stayed at the Ashram during 1938-40.

In 1938, I was taken to Bhagavan. His face radiated endless love and serenity. I prostrated before him. He said to me, "It seems you have been called." After thus greeting me, he became deeply absorbed. Without looking at anyone or anything, he was penetrating into my innermost Self. **Suddenly, he turned to me and, with a look that acquired an indescribable intensity, aroused in me quietness, deep peace and a great compassion for all living beings of the universe. From that day on, I knew that Bhagavan was not an ordinary master but a Universal *Sadguru*.**

I then began to tune myself to his *upadesa,* which I perceived was vitalizing and transforming me in every way. I knew that what I could absorb of the light of initiation would be according to my own efforts. I was

to develop more and more control of my thoughts for receiving the subtle vibrations radiated by Bhagavan.

One day Bhagavan told me, "Silence is the most powerful form of teaching transmitted from the master to the adept. The soundless voice is pure intuition. It is the voice of the spiritual mind speaking in our innermost being. Self-enquiry is the only path we have in order to eliminate spiritual unconsciousness, which is widespread. Self-enquiry brings the consciousness of the divine, the universal truth and the light that governs the universe. All this must be known, felt, lived and realized. In order to realize this truth, we need to eliminate the thinking mind, to dissolve it in the Universal Self."

To forget the ego and discover the Universal Being, is the direct path taught by Bhagavan. After practising Self-enquiry for a period of time one awakens a current of consciousness, the supreme consciousness. Bhagavan recommends: "Effort is necessary to move oneself deeper and deeper in the practice of Self-enquiry. Firm determination is essential to achieve the experience."

Diving into the right side of the chest, the adept enters into the attitude of silence. Thoughts disappear and the state of consciousness, 'I am that, I am that', arises.

Bhagavan spoke very little and showed the world how much could be transmitted by silence. With his attitude of serene benevolence he set all at ease. I felt with absolute certainty that all the knowledge to be gained would be simply assimilated from his holy presence, for I had caught the truth that he is the link to the formless Being.

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Dr. M.R. Krishnamurthi Iyer was the first doctor of the Ashram dispensary, which was started in 1929.

In the later 1930s, continuous hiccups gripped Sri Bhagavan. I was treating him. Days passed and I had tried all the medicines known to the profession; all in vain. I got thoroughly upset. I spoke no words to Him, but standing in His presence, I prayed mentally that He should show me a way to cure Him.

I returned home grief-stricken and cried and cried like a child till I fell asleep. In the early hours of the morning, Sri Bhagavan appeared in my dream and asked, "Why are you crying?" I replied sobbing, "Bhagavan, you know why. I don't know how to save you from hiccups. What am I to do?" Sri Bhagavan consoled me saying, "Don't cry. In the courtyard of your house there is a plant of *Seenhikodi*. Pluck some leaves from it, fry them in ghee and then pound them along with dried ginger and jaggery, make balls of it and bring them to me. Don't worry!"

I woke up delighted. My wife and I went out with a hurricane lamp and searched for the herb in the courtyard. Except for a small strip, the courtyard was plastered in cement. In the small strip many bushes had grown. There among them, we did find the herb; prepared the medicine and almost ran to the Ashram. As we entered the hall very early in the morning, we found Sri Bhagavan on His couch. With a smiling face, He greeted us and extended His hand with these words: "Give me what you have brought!" He swallowed a part of the medicine.When I spoke to Him about the dream He looked innocent as if He knew nothing about it! Needless to say, the hiccups stopped as expected and He was restored to normal health. [See no.135, p.315 for the wife's reminiscences.]

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Prof. Shiva Mohan Lal (1900-83), Head, Dept. of Philosophy, Osmania University, Hyderabad, an Urdu scholar, has translated *Who am I?* and other books on Sri Ramana into Urdu. Most of his family members are devotees of Sri Ramana.

I would often visit the Ashram, particularly during vacations. I was very dedicated and attached to Bhagavan. Once I sent a telegram to the Ashram: "My wife is suffering intensely due to labour pains. I seek Sri Bhagavan's blessings." After the telegram was read out to Bhagavan, he remarked, "Will it be done merely by reporting it to me?" Muruganar [No. 53] and others were present at that time.

Again, at 3 p.m. the same day another telegram was sent by me stating that my wife had given birth and that the delivery was smooth. Bhagavan simply acknowledged it with his usual 'Um Um!' Muruganar who was there asked: "Bhagavan, you said in the morning, will it be done by merely reporting it to me? But was it not because you were informed

and your blessings were sought that there was an easy delivery for Mrs. Shiva Mohan Lal?" Bhagavan gave an understanding smile but did not reply. He resumed his usual serene gaze, and stern silence.[1]

Once, while returning from the Ashram via Katpadi, I ran out of British currency. My Nizam State's coins were unacceptable at the station to buy the ticket. Sitting on a bench as I started remembering Bhagavan, a complete stranger came and asked whether I belonged to Hyderabad, perhaps because of my typical Hyderabadi dress. He was interested in having some silver coins of the Nizam State. This helped me to get my ticket to Hyderabad.

My sister was greatly worried about her son being issueless. At my behest she sought Bhagavan's intervention in this regard. We went to the Ashram along with her daughter-in-law, who presented a handful of almonds to Bhagavan. He chose to pick up only two almonds out of the lot presented to him, without uttering a word. In course of time, she was blessed with two children.

Some reminiscences as recorded by G.V. Rajeswara Rao, a founder member of Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad, are as follows:

Prof. Lal first heard about Bhagavan from one of his colleagues in Osmania University. However, having seen a number of fake *sadhus*, he was not interested in the Maharshi. Later, an article appeared in *The Hindu* on Bhagavan's life and teachings along with his photograph. Again, the same colleague drew Prof. Lal's attention to the article. But he remained unmoved. That day, in the evening, when he came home and was going to have his bath, he was amazed to see Bhagavan in the bath room in the same posture as he had seen in the photograph in *The Hindu*. He got thrilled and his joy knew no bounds. All his earlier doubts vanished and he was irrevocably drawn towards Bhagavan.

Prof. Lal told about his vision to famous Swami Chinmayananda [No.83], who advised him to go to Tiruvannamalai and have Bhagavan's *darshan.* On his first visit to the Ashram in 1938, he bought two baskets of fruits at Madras for offering them to Bhagavan. In the train to Katpadi, the very thought of Bhagavan sent him into raptures and he became oblivious of his surroundings, which made someone knock off the fruit baskets. Prof. Lal approached Bhagavan with a throbbing heart and eyes brimming with tears. He prostrated before Bhagavan and stood tansfixed until someone asked him to sit.

Subsequently, every visit had its own marvels. Bhagavan showered his blessings on him and he was always in a blissful state in his presence. He used to sit as near as possible to Bhagavan and with eyes closed, while tears trickled down his cheeks. On one occasion when he sat before Bhagavan, he saw only the empty sofa and realized that the formless had taken a form out of compassion for the devotees.

On one of his visits, Prof. Lal gave some amount to the *sarvadhikari* for a photo of Bhagavan. When he went next, Bhagavan's attendant Venkataratnam[2] told him that the photo was ready. When Prof. Lal and his wife approached Bhagavan, the former stretched his hands eagerly for receiving the photo from Divine hands. "Why, Why", said Bhagavan with a gracious smile and gave the photo to Mrs. Chandrani Lal. The photo which contains a *sloka* underneath written by Bhagavan himself is now at Sri Ramana Kendram, Hyderabad.

One winter morning, Prof. Lal took a nice shawl for Bhagavan and gave it to his attendant, as Bhagavan rarely accepted any expensive gifts. It was a pleasant surprise for the Prof. when he saw Bhagavan in his seat wrapped in that shawl, with his face beaming with a sweet smile. Prof. Lal was happy beyond words. T.P.Ramachandra Iyer [No.54] remarked with affection – "You are really lucky."

One day when Prof. Lal got up early for *giri pradakshina*, it was raining. Still, he decided to stick to his schedule and went to Bhagavan to inform him about it. Bhagavan nodded saying, "Yes, Yes", despite the rain. As Prof. Lal reached the Ashram gate, he was surprised to find a person standing there with an umbrella for him! All the way round the holy hill, he was thinking about Bhagavan's consideration for his devotees.

Another case of Bhagavan's uncanny ability to be aware of the needs of his devotees occurred when a lady devotee had to return alone to Kothagudem. Bhagavan asked Prof. Lal to accompany her on his way back to Hyderabad and to assist her on the way. She reached home safely and happily.

When Bhagavan saw Prof. Lal's translation of the book *History of Indian Philosophy* in Urdu,[3] he told him to consider translating *Who am I*? into Urdu. The Prof. did so and took copies of the translated book to the Ashram on his next visit. He read them before Bhagavan with emotion and came to the guest house exhausted. After a short while, Bhagavan's attendant came to him with a request to return to the hall, where Mrs. Taleyarkhan[4] was waiting for him. As she knew Urdu well, Bhagavan told Prof. Lal to read the translation to her. She was all praise for the job so

well done. Subsequently, Bhagavan asked the Prof. to translate *The Maharshi's Gospel* [5] into Urdu which he did. Prof. Lal also wrote in Urdu *The Maharshi and His Message,* which was published by the Abul Kalam Azad Oriental Research Institute, Hyderabad.

Whenever Prof. Lal talked about Bhagavan, tears will trickle down his eyes. V. Krithivasan (a staunch devotee of Hyderabad Kendram) told the compiler-editor about his visit to Prof. Lal's residence in Hyderabad. When the Prof. came to know that Krithivasan's mother tongue was Tamil, he began to shed tears because he felt that he was lucky to read Bhagavan's hand-written documents in their original form.

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1. The delivery related to Prof. S. Dhareshwari in 1939, who is a devotee at Hyderabad Kendram. She retired as Head, Dept. of Ancient Indian History and Culture, Osmania University, Hyderabad.
2. He was entrusted to Bhagavan's care by Prof. Lal when he was a boy.
3. Urdu was medium of instruction in Osmania University till 1949 for all subjects including medicine and engineering.
4. A great devotee of Bhagavan, who got the Pathala Lingam (where Bhagavan had done *tapas* totally unconscious of his body) renovated and had got it inaugurated by the then Governor General of India – C. Rajagopalachari in 1949. *Refer* no. 166, pp.364-6.
5. This publication of Sri Ramanasramam contains answers to some of the questions put to Sri Ramana from time to time.

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Prabhakar, after getting convinced of Sri Ramana's greatness, wrote *Prapatti Satakam* in Sanskrit.

When I came to Bhagavan in 1949, I was a pure rationalist, averse to anything spiritual. Though I had heard about Bhagavan and had seen his photos, I ignored him. However, a total change in my life took place suddenly. One night, Bhagavan appeared in my dream. In that dream my boss pointed to Bhagavan and asked me whether I knew Him. On replying in the negative, I was told that He was none other than Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi and that I should go to Arunachala and have His *darshan*. I replied that I felt no such need, and in any case had no money to travel. My boss offered to give me the required money, that is, Rs. 60. At this point, I woke up from the dream. I hesitated to narrate

the dream to my boss, though I did to one of my close friends, who persuaded me to approach the boss with the story.

One day I picked up courage and narrated my dream to the boss, avoiding the portion dealing with money. The boss was unmoved. He said, "Give more attention to your job and save some money to pay for the trip to your Bhagavan." But before I could move away from the place, there was a sudden change in the boss's attitude and he asked, "Do you really have a deep desire to visit Bhagavan?" On my replying in the affirmative, he asked me how much money I would require. And even before I could open my mouth he wrote a cheque for Rs.60! Receiving the exact amount indicated in the dream, I felt that it was all Bhagavan's Grace, and immediately left for Tiruvannamalai.

More thrilling than this was the fact that while entering the hall I felt as if Bhagavan was looking intently at the entrance to the hall and waiting for someone to arrive. As soon as I entered, He gave a beaming smile and a welcoming nod! For the first time in my life, I did *ashtanga namaskaram* to anyone. At the very first glimpse of Sri Bhagavan, I became a full-fledged *bhakta*!

I asked Bhagavan, "Did you summon me?" He nodded His head in assent. I repeated the question twice; Bhagavan nodded each time. This stabilised my bondage to Bhagavan. During my stay I used to ask questions and Bhagavan would reply to every one of them. Once Bhagavan told me, "You say I am Prabhakar. Who is this Prabhakar? Why do you accept that you are Prabhakar? Your parents called you so; you being a rationalist, why should you accept it? Who is this Prabhakar? Use your reasoning faculty and search for 'who you really are'? Then, the Prabhakar of this particular form and name will drop off and the real being alone will shine."

In spite of odds and obstacles, I led a peace-filled life because of my faith in and devotion to Bhagavan. I got all this not due to the excellence of my reasoning power or spiritual maturity but because of the lustre shed by Bhagavan on me.

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Lakshmi Ranganadham was affectionately referred to as 'our Lakshmi' by Sri Ramana.

I came to Bhagavan through my brother Narayana Rao. I stayed in Tiruvannamalai with my mother, and used to visit the Ashram. Chinnaswami was then doing the Ashram cooking all alone. I was asked to assist him in the kitchen. One day while I was grinding rice for the next day's *iddlies*, suddenly Bhagavan came there and asked, "Why are you doing it all alone?" Then He also sat with me and completed the grinding. Even now my hairs stand on end when I think of it!

Bhagavan could be stern when we made mistakes. Once I made some *puris* which were to be served in the afternoon. I fried them in oil, but also made a few in ghee. I placed the specially made ones on top, so that I could quietly serve them to Bhagavan. Everything was distributed. When all was over, Bhagavan called me and said, "Lakshmi, don't do this again. If you try to differentiate, I will never touch any of your preparations." How did He know what I had done? I never repeated the mistake. Bhagavan's words were so powerful that one's entire being got changed with a single word of His.

159

Ramaswami Pillai (1895-1995) was a long-time associate of Sri Ramana.

I first saw Bhagavan when I was studying in school. He looked indescribably majestic. Since then He has been God to me in human form. I did not ask for anything. He turned on me that look of heart-melting grace that He so often bestows on newcomers. I felt filled to the brim just by seeing Him.

Miracles did take place in the presence of Bhagavan. Strangely people like me, very close to Bhagavan, never cared to notice anything *happening*, as we were all so thoroughly absorbed in Him, in His Presence! I am able to recollect a 'miracle' that took place. A person from a town near Tiruvannamalai lost his eye sight owing to small pox or severe fever. He was advised that if he went to Sri Ramanasramam, Ramana Maharshi would give him back his eyesight. He arrived at the Ashram and enquiring his way reached Sri Bhagavan's hall.

A few days earlier, two young doctors had arrived for *darshan* of Bhagavan. They were totally captivated by Him. They were to take leave of Bhagavan before going back to Madras. They came to the hall, prostrated

and went up to their car, when they had an urge to have one more glimpse of Bhagavan. Meanwhile, the blind man had entered the hall and was praying to Bhagavan that his eyesight be somehow restored by His Grace. Bhagavan was listening to everything, but kept absolutely silent. The doctors who witnessed this, voluntarily took the blind man in their car to Madras and treated him.

After some months, I saw a man prostrating to Bhagavan with deep and sincere gratitude for having restored his eyesight. Bhagavan listened to him unmoved, as if He had nothing to do with it. This was the natural way He performed miracles.

The other 'miracle' occurred when Bhagavan was staying at the Skandasram. In those days, He was taking only one meal a day. In the evening a disciple got rice and coconut as *bhiksha.* Bhagavan told us to make gruel by grinding the rice and coconut, and add sugar to it. But there was no sugar in the Ashram. Even salt, which Bhagavan suggested as an alternative, was not to be found.

At about nine p.m. there was a knock at the Ashram's door, which was opened by me. To our great surprise, we saw two young men, who had braved through the drizzling rain and darkness, with a packet of sugar candy and a bunch of plantains. Bhagavan jokingly said, "Aye! Sugar candy has come with bananas to supplement." The sugar candy was powdered and duly mixed with the gruel.

Bhagavan asked the visitors how it was that they had to come at that time. One of them replied, "Bhagavan, it was my good fortune to have read three articles by Mr. Humphreys [No. 92] published in the *International Psychic Gazette*. Ever since, it has been my greatest ambition to see Bhagavan and have His *darshan*. Somehow, it is only today that we had the opportunity. As college students at Coimbatore, we came for an excursion here and are going back tomorrow morning. Not willing to lose this God-sent opportunity, we came here not minding rain or darkness. We shall never forget this most memorable meeting."

V. Ganesan in his* Moments Remembered *records:

One day, when Ramaswami Pillai entered the hall, discussion was going on as to who was the greater of the two: Siva or Sakti. Bhagavan, as usual, sat in silence, with a look of amusement. The trend of the talk was that without Sakti, Siva could not do anything and this argument looked infallible. Ramaswami Pillai also joined the fray and said, "Yes, yes! 'He' is contained in 'She'!" The Sakti party became jubilant. "But" interrupted

Pillai: "He can be independent and be without 'She'; but 'She' cannot be without 'He'!" The Siva-party looked triumphant. Bhagavan laughed till tears came to his eyes; he enjoyed the spelling-game thoroughly!

David Godman records:

Bhagavan could turn the most mundane event into an opportunity for spiritual instruction. Once, for example, Ramaswami Pillai was searching for a key that he had lost. After sometime he came into the hall and told Bhagavan about the missing key, who said to him, "The key is where it always was. It is not lost. Only your memory is lost. *Atman* (the Self) is always there, but due to *ajnana* (ignorance) we spend our time searching for it."

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Morarji Desai, Prime Minister of India (March 1977 to July 1979), was President of Ramana Kendra, Delhi, 1968-70.

I had the privilege of seeing Ramana Maharshi in August 1935 in the hall in which he usually sat. He was sitting on a sofa and wore only a loincloth. I could see an aura on his face, which was glowing with peace and joy. I sat opposite to him but did not ask him anything. He too did not say anything to me. I sat just over an hour and just looked at his face. Till today I have not seen that aura, that joy or peace on anybody else's face. That hour of perfect stillness in that silent presence has been a precious memory ever since.

While I sat there, no questions arose in my mind, nor did I feel any desire to ask anything. I was at complete peace with myself. It was this experience which convinced me that Ramana Maharshi had realized God or Truth. Some of his disciples who were present asked him some questions, which he answered. He, however, said nothing of his own accord.

I had to leave the place next day by train at about twelve. About an hour-and-a half before the time of departure, I approached Ramana Maharshi for permission to leave. He told me that I should go after I had eaten. We sat down for lunch along with the Maharshi, at about eleven O'clock. After lunch, I bowed down to him and left.

The visit left an abiding impression on me and convinced me that Ramana Maharshi was a realised soul and that the ideal of 'action in

inaction' as propounded in the *Gita* is really attainable.

Presiding over the 99th Jayanti celebrations of Ramana Maharshi at Ramana Kendra, New Delhi, on 13th January 1979, Morarji Desai as Prime Minister, said:

The Maharshi seemed to know everything. He knew the language of the animals. He listened to their complaints. He treated every being in the same way, whether it was a cow or a dog, a crow or a monkey. All were equal in his eyes, the beggar and the millionaire. He never went out of Tiruvannamalai. He refused to go out and preach. He said, "If I am a *jnani*, I consider everybody else a *jnani* too. What is there to give?" He regarded everybody as himself. He made no attempt to convert anybody. **One got transformed by his very presence.**

Many civilizations have flourished and then disappeared. But in this country you find our old culture and the ancient religion still alive. And it is this that keeps the country alive. It is persons like the Maharshi who keep it alive…All learning should come from within. That is the way the Maharshi showed. He did not criticize others way of life. He said, "Stick to your own religion and follow it properly." Ramana Maharshi taught that one could do *sadhana* in one's chosen way and reach the goal.

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M.V. Ramanachalam (1921-2003), son of M.S. Venkataraman Iyer, was a boyhood friend of Sri Ramana.

My father Venkataraman was a few years younger to Bhagavan. He and Bhagavan lived in the same house, which was situated close to the Vaigai river, in Madurai. He would join Sri Ramana and his friends in their nocturnal escapades [daring adventures done at night]. After sneaking out in the dead of the night, the boys would go to the river bank and practise '*chilambam*' (a martial art using long bamboo poles).

Once, when my father returned late at night, my grandfather caught him, tied him to a tree in front of the house and caned him. Sri Ramana was watching this. Later, when my father heard about the young Brahmana Swami dwelling in Virupaksha Cave at Arunachala he paid a visit to him out of curiosity. But the moment he stepped into Bhagavan's presence he began to shed copious tears. To his amazement he found

nothing there of the former Venkataraman, his playmate. When he was about to leave, Brahmana Swami asked him in a subdued tone, "Is that tree still there in front of your house?"

From then on, my father, who was working in the District Board Office, used to rush to Tiruvannamalai whenever he felt like visiting Bhagavan. At times, he would be accompanied by my mother. At Skandashram, Mother Alagammal, who was very fond of my mother, taught her many songs pregnant with deep spiritual meaning. Later when my mother sang them in front of Bhagavan, he would remark, "Oh! Did Mother teach you all these?"

My father considered Bhagavan the Supreme Eternal. Whenever the topic of Bhagavan was raised or Bhagavan's name was even mentioned, he would simply shed tears. As he was unable to refrain from weeping in Bhagavan's presence, Bhagavan gave him the name *azhugani siddhar* – the one who attains *siddhi*, that is, liberation, by weeping for God.

I remember visiting the Ashram when I was just five. I had high fever and was sleeping near the door of Bhagavan's hall. I felt delirious. Bhagavan would now and then lift his head from the sofa and tell me to go to sleep.

Once, as a boy, while leaving the Ashram, a deep sorrow suddenly overtook me and I began to cry. I refused to go with my mother, telling her that I wanted to stay with Bhagavan. Bhagavan, who was going that way, stopped and told me gently, "Go with your mother now and come back when you are 21."

My father died in 1939 when I was just 17. After a few months my mother took us for Bhagavan's *darshan*. When she prostrated she began to shed tears. As it was the custom in those days, my mother was not wearing any jewellery. She had her head shaved and covered it with her sari. She was wondering whether Bhagavan would recognize her and asked, "Bhagavan do you recognize me?" He smiled and said, "Why not? Only the makeup has changed (*veyshamdhaan maari irukku*)."

When 21, as I got posted at a place near Tiruvannamalai, I could go to the Ashram on Sundays and holidays to sit at his feet. Once I took his permission to go to the summit of the hill. There I scraped some Kartikai Deepam [*Refer* p. 411] residue of soot from a rock and put it on a leaf. I wanted to present it to Bhagavan. When I came down, the *sarvadhikari* called and shouted, "Where were you? Bhagavan is waiting for you. Go and join him for lunch." After lunch, I approached him

when attendant Krishnaswami was not there, for he would never allow anyone to approach Bhagavan easily. I took out the *Deepam* ghee which I had collected from the summit and offered it to him. He pulled my hand closer and took the offered *prasad,* and with great reverence applied it on his forehead saying, "Are you satisfied now?"

At times my mother used to help Bhagavan in the kitchen. One day she was helping him in grinding. While turning the grinding stone Bhagavan's head butted against my mother's head. Immediately Bhagavan rubbed his head and exclaimed, "Ah! Parvatham, is it paining?"

I used to read religious books. Once I read a book which explained Dakshinamurti's *chinmudra*. Wonder of wonders, when I entered the hall on the weekend he was explaining *chinmudra.* The purport of his talk was: "It is just like when you point to God above with your index finger. We then generally point to ourselves using our thumb. Joining of the index finger and thumb is *chinmudra*, which is symbolically indicative of 'That thou art' (*tatvamsi*), the union of *jivatma* and *Paramatma*."

A small book *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam* had a minor printing mistake. Bhagavan wrote the correct letter on bits of paper and pasted them in each copy of the book.

My mother wrote a letter to Bhagavan complaining that I had refused to consider marriage proposals. When I came to the Ashram next, Bhagavan asked in a serious tone, "Did you see your mother's letter?" I was stunned by Bhagavan's disapproving voice and I came away weeping. The *sarvadhikari* showed me my mother's letter. Seeing the writing on the wall, not long after that I got married and went to the Ashram with my wife in March 1950. The *sarvadhikari* permitted us to have Bhagavan's *darshan* in the Nirvana Room. As soon as I prostrated, Bhagavan talked to my wife in Malayalam. How he knew that she was from Kerala is still a wonder to me.

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Swami Ramanananda Saraswati, formerly T.N. Venkataraman (1914-2007), was President of Sri Ramanasramam for over forty years till 1994. After resigning his bank job he had moved to Tiruvannamalai in 1938 to help his father Swami Niranjanananda, the *sarvadhikari*, in managing the Ashram affairs.

My birth had the blessings of Bhagavan. When Bhagavan's mother (my grandmother) Alagammal came to the hill in 1913 along with my mother, she told Bhagavan that Nagaswami (Maharshi's elder brother) had died issueless, Alamelu (Maharshi's younger sister) also had no children and his younger brother Nagasundaram's wife, that is my mother, had lost two issues in their childhood. She prayed that my mother be blessed with a male child so that the family line might continue. Bhagavan smiled graciously and she took this as his blessing. I was born a year later.

My mother passed away when I was not yet three and my father Nagasundaram, who was *sarvadhikari* of the Ashram, left me at the house of my aunt Alamelu (Maharshi's sister) and her husband Pichu Iyer.

I was blessed with my first *upadesam* of Bhagavan when I was six: In 1920, at Skandashram a plate of fruit and sweets had been put aside for a lame monkey called 'Nondy'. When nobody was around I went near the plate, took a sweet and put it in my mouth. All of a sudden the monkey appeared, limped towards me, slapped me and grabbed the plate. Then Bhagavan appeared on the scene and said, "This is a lesson for you; now understand that we should not desire things which belong to others." I fully understood the profound meaning of this *upadesam* long afterwards when I was president of the Ashram.

With the exception of the saffron-robed grandma Alagammal, no other woman could stay at night at Skandashram. So my aunt and uncle would return to the town in the evening, taking me along with them. As they had to carry me in their arms, on some days, they would leave me at Skandashram. On those days Bhagavan would put me to bed by his side and see that I slept comfortably. In the morning he would brush my teeth and bathe me. He would sit outside on the stone couch and ask me to sit beside him. He would say, "What are the pranks that you play back home?" When aunt and uncle would come up the hill from the town, he would look in their direction and tell me, "See there, your aunt is coming" and would get up with a laugh.

In May 1922, when my grandmother (Maharshi's mother) was on her death bed, she wanted to see me, her only grandchild. A telegram was sent to our place. We arrived only the day after the grandmother had left the body which, by then, had been carried down the hill for burial. It fell to my lucky lot to lay to rest the blessed mother who gave birth to such a great *jnani*.

Soon after our marriage, aunt Alamelu and uncle Pichu Iyer took my wife Nagu (Nagalakshmi) to Bhagavan for his blessings. When she came out of the hall after Bhagavan's *darshan*, she was impressed by the *saree* worn by a young lady, who had come from Madras, and told her, "How beautiful is your *saree*!" The lady's father who had heard this, on returning to Madras, purchased two similar *sarees* and sent them to the Ashram with a request that the packet be given to Nagu. All letters addressed to the Ashram were invariably placed before Bhagavan, and so was this packet and the covering letter.

Next day, when Bhagavan saw Nagu at the Ashram kitchen, he said, "Nagu, when you see someone wearing nice ornaments or a nice *saree*, you should think that you are wearing them." Nagu, with her eyes moist and voice tremulous, said, "Bhagavan, I did not ask for the *saree*, I only said that the *saree* was beautiful." But Bhagavan repeated his *upadesa* and moved on. From that day onward till her last moment 55 years later, Nagu never asked for anything from anybody. She found contentment to be the best of riches, thanks to Bhagavan's gracious *upadesa*.

It was Bhagavan who named everyone of my three sons and four daughters. He would choose an apt name and explain the reason for the choice.

A week before the *mahanirvana*, the cancerous growth near Bhagavan's left elbow had swollen to a big size with a bandage around it. A number of doctors and many important people were in the Nirvana Room. Aunt Alamelu took my last child, barely 11 months old, near Bhagavan. The child started prattling 'inga, inga' unusually loudly. Alamelu took the child far from Bhagavan but her prattle was audible to Bhagavan. Those were the days when the smallest movement of any part of the body would entail excruciating pain for Bhagavan. But he turned his face in all directions and said, "I hear the voice of 'inga' baby. Is she here? Poor child! if she raises her voice, she is carried far away!" Someone ran to Aunt Alamelu who brought the child to Bhagavan, who looked at her with compassion saying 'inga'. The child shouted 'inga' and Bhagavan's face was wreathed in smiles.

Perumalswami had served Bhagavan when he was on the hill. He would also play with me when I was a boy. He later turned against the Ashram and gave us much trouble, to the extent of involving the Ashram in litigation. When he fell sick in 1945 and was evicted from his

place, he moved to a hut in Seshadri Swami's place, adjacent to the Ashram. I took pity on him and with Bhagavan's blessings would take food and medicines for him. One day Bhagavan told me, "Poor Perumalswami! He did all sorts of mischief, but we should remember the good that he did in the past. Once when I had suffered from serious stomach upset and diarrhoea, he used to clean up and attend upon me with devotion."

I met Mahatma Gandhi at Madras in January 1946, and presented him a photo of Bhagavan and some Ashram publications. Gandhiji kept looking at the photo and said in Hindi, "What a great Sage!"

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Robert Adams (1928-97), an American, had a vision of a small Indian figure, appearing at his bedside. He consulted Paramhansa Yogananda,[1] who showed him the picture of Sri Ramana, which he recognized as the figure in the dream. He visited Ramanasramam and was with Sri Ramana for three years – 1947-50. His book *Silence of the Heart* contains a summary of *satsangs* he held in USA.

When 19, I arrived at Bombay on my way to Tiruvannamalai. It was about 8.30 a.m. when I entered the hall. Sri Ramana was on his couch reading the mail. I sat down in front of him. He looked at me and smiled, and I smiled back. There were about 30 persons in the hall. The Maharshi asked me if I had my breakfast. I said, 'No'. He spoke to the attendant, who came back with two giant leaves; one with fruits and one with some porridge and pepper. After I consumed the food, I just lay down on the floor. I was very tired.

The Maharshi had arthritis in the legs and could hardly walk at that time [1947]. His attendants helped him to get up and he walked out of the room. When he came outside he said something to his attendant who motioned me to come. The Maharshi guided me to a little shack that I might use while I was staying there. He came inside with me. I bet you think we spoke about profound subjects. On the contrary, he was a natural man. He was the Self of the universe. He asked how my trip was, where I was from, and what made me come here. Then he said I should rest. I lay myself down on the cot and he left.

I was awakened at about five in the evening by Ramana himself, who had brought food for me. Can you imagine that? We spoke briefly. I ate and slept. The next morning I went to the hall. Everybody sat around just watching Ramana. He would go through the mail and at times may read it aloud, talk to some devotees, but his composure never changed. **Never did I see elsewhere such compassion and love.**

Then people started asking questions. His replies were very succinct. They weren't like you read in a book. Apparently, what you read in a book is his reply to three or four people. They condense it all into one question and answer. People usually asked a question or made a statement. If he agreed, he would nod or say yes. That is it. If he didn't, he would offer an explanation in, may be, one or two sentences.

There were Muslims, Catholic priests and people from many races and nationalities at the Ashram. When I was there for a week or so, two of his disciples were jokingly arguing about something at a meal. I asked the interpreter what they were talking about. He said, "Ramana's couch is covered with lice, and he refuses to let us kill them. They climb over this body and legs and he doesn't care. We want to have the couch fumigated, but he won't let us." Next day, when he went for his morning walk, they sprayed the couch with DDT. On coming back he smelled the couch, smiled and jokingly said, "Someone has tricked me." **He never got angry or mad; I don't think he knew what the words meant.**

A few days later, there was a German lady who had come to the Ashram, and had made a donation. She was not happy for some reason and was complaining to Ramana, who just kept silent. I asked the interpreter, "What does she want?" He told me, "She wants her donation back and go back to Germany." When she started arguing with the manager of the Ashram, Ramana said in English, "Give back her donation and add 50 rupees to it", which was done, and she left. This was his nature. **He never saw anything wrong; he never took anyone out of his love no matter what they did. He loved everyone just the same.**

Ramana used to quote from the scriptures; Jesus and Ramana said basically the same things. Jesus said, " the Kingdom of Heaven is within you." Ramana said, "The Self is within you. Search for and find it, and awaken." Jesus said, "Son, I am with you always, and all that I have is yours." Ramana said, "I can never leave you, I am always with you." His compassion never left him.

In April 1950, I was in Bangalore to see Papa Ram Dass. When informed that Ramana has left his body, I went to Tiruvannamalai. The crowds had already started to come, thousands and thousands of people. So l climbed the hill and went into one of the caves, and stayed there for five days. When I came down the crowd had dispersed. He had already been interred. I enquired of his devotee who saw him last, "What were the last words he spoke?" He said, "While he was leaving the body, a peacock flew on top of a wall and started screeching. Ramana asked his attendant, 'Has anyone fed the peacock yet?' Those were his last words."

I have been to many teachers, many saints and many sages. I was with Nisargadatta, Anand Mayi Ma, Papa Ram Dass, Neem Karoli Baba and many others, but never did I meet anyone who exuded such compassion, such love, such bliss as Ramana Maharshi.

A sample from Adam's poems:

Who am I?

Feel your reality,
in the stillness,
in the quietness,
where there is no mind,
no thought, no words,
who are You then?
You just are.
I AM I AM.
I am not this
I am not that.
I AM.
I am that which has always been,
I am that which will always be,
I AM THAT I AM.

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1. Yogananda had visited Sri Ramana in 1935. See picture no. 13 in the book.

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Ramakrishna Madhavpeddi, an Andhra and an attorney at the Madras High court, visited Sri Ramana in April 1948.

I first visited Ramanasramam when 24. At that time I was very much depressed owing to the sudden death at the age of twenty of my very close relative [his wife]. My father was urging me to visit the Maharshi. He had already visited him twice, with a list of doubts all of which were cleared, without a single word being spoken by him. He had also experienced complete peace in the Maharshi's presence.

It was about 9 a.m. when I reached the Ashram. I was asked to stay in the Guest House for Gents. As luck would have it, there I chanced to occupy my place on the floor next to N. Balarama Reddy [No. 34], an established devotee. In addition to my work in the courts, I also wrote articles for various journals on Telugu literature and dabbled in poetry. This helped in striking a conversation with him.

He took me where Sri Ramana was reclining on a sofa and asked me to sit with eyes closed. Although there was absolute silence in the hall I could not sit with eyes closed. I was restless and felt as if the time was dragging. Slowly, my mind began to reflect on all my miseries, one after another. Everyday, for three days, I accompanied Reddy to the hall, and every time I sat down my thoughts would take off at high speed and my misery increased. So, on the third day, I told Reddy that I had come to the Maharshi for peace but I was only experiencing an increase of pain and misery. He asked me to stay on for one more day.

On the morning of the fourth day I was sitting in the hall with eyes closed. At one point I happened to open my eyes and saw the Maharshi looking at me intently. Suddenly, all thoughts vanished from my mind and I experienced a delightful blank or void. Then a resplendent light enveloped me fully. I was empty of thoughts but full of immense happiness. I was one with some indefinable peace and splendid glory. After sometime, I again became aware of my body. This experience made me believe in God for the first time. In spite of all my theories of Marxism, dialectical materialism and atheism, I could not deny the truth of this wonderful experience.

This condition continued for three days. I witnessed my body go through its daily activities but I remained fixed in that immense peace. The Maharshi's look pierced into me when I sat before him and even

when I was not before him. **The eyes of the Maharshi are the kindest and most powerful energy of the universe.** I left the Ashram after six days. Remembering those days with the Maharshi brings ecstasy to me even today.

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M.G. Shanmukam's Tamil biography *Ramana Maharshi – Life and Teachings* was published in 1937. His father, a police officer, along with the Swami of Ishanya Mutt, Tiruvannamalai, was instrumental in the construction of the old hall during 1926-7, where Sri Ramana lived for two decades.

During my 24 years of personal association with Bhagavan, I found that he seldom preached elaborately. He would give hints which keen seekers had to absorb carefully. He once said categorically, for practising *atma vichara* everyday is auspicious. All other *sadhanas* require external objects and congenial environment, but for *atma vichara* nothing external to oneself is required. Turning the mind within is all that is necessary. While one is engaged in *atma vichara* one can attend to other activities also.

Traditional upbringing gradually involved me in the study of the *sastras*, doing *japa*, *bhajan*, and regular *puja* three times a day. I came to the conviction that the highest human attainment was the state of *jivanmukti* (full enlightenment whilst still in the body). During 1921-25, as a college student, I fervently prayed that I should meet a *jivanmukta* and receive his blessings.

My prayers were soon answered! My father was transferred to Tiruvannamalai. At Katpadi, while travelling in train towards Tiruvannamalai, I had a remarkable vision of Bhagavan. Thus my *sadguru* came to me and absorbed me even before I could have His physical *darshan*!

When I arrived at the Ashram, Bhagavan gave me a warm welcome with a benign smile. As He was seeing me for the first time, His two spontaneous utterances surprised me. Like an affectionate mother, He asked me, "When did you come?" and "How is your right hand?" My right hand was badly fractured when I was 14 years old, and though it had healed up, it remained bent and short. I used to cover it up

with full sleeves and even my friends did not know of this serious deformity. How did Bhagavan know about it? And what affectionate concern He showed! After Bhagavan inquired about it, my sense of inferiority, because of the defect, totally disappeared. More than all this, He asked me to be seated in front of Him. Gazing at Him I sat down and I do not know what happened to me then. When I got up two hours had elapsed. This was an experience I had never had before and I have always cherished it as the first and foremost *prasad* and blessing received from my *sadguru*. That day I understood the purport of the statement, 'The *sadguru* ever gives unasked!' That moment I knew I had been accepted into His Fold. He allowed me to enjoy this strong bond until His *mahasamadhi*, and even after.

Daily I would go to Him by two in the afternoon and return home only at 8 p.m. Bhagavan would quote from *Ribhu Gita, Kaivalya Navaneetha, Yoga Vasishtam* and other *advaitic* texts and explain to me their greatness. All the while I felt that I was in the blissful presence of a *brahmajnai* (one who has realised the Self), so highly extolled in our scriptures.

Once sitting before Him, the following thoughts rose in my mind with great force and were running repeatedly for a long time: 'Do not argue on controversial points of philosophy or read too much of philosophical books.' 'Silently practise either *vichara* or *dhyanam'* (meditation). 'Do not do anything which you know to be wrong.'

Some of Bhagavan's personal instructions to me were: (i) If you observe the breathing one-pointedly, such attention will lead you into *kumbhaka* (retention), which is *jnana pranayama*. (ii) The more you humble yourself, the better it is for you. (iii) You should look upon the world only as a dream. (iv) Except attending to the duty-work in life, the rest of the time should be spent in *atma nishta* (absorption in the Self). (v) Do not cause slightest hindrance or disturbance to others. (vi) Do all your work yourself. (vii) Both likes and dislikes should be discarded and eschewed. (vii) With attention focused on the first person and on the heart within, one should relentlessly practice 'Who am I?' During such practice, the mind might suddenly spring up; so you have to vigilantly pursue the *vichara* 'Who am I?'

Sri Ramana was a *sarvajnani* (all-knower). I got many proofs of it. My father gave me pocket-money of three *annas* a day. For that amount I would buy *sambrani* (incense), which was burnt in a brazier in

Bhagavan's hall. One day I did not get the pocket money and therefore refrained from going to Bhagavan. The next day, Bhagavan graciously remarked, "Yesterday you did not come because you could not get *sambrani*. Veneration in the heart is enough."

My father was suddenly transferred to Vellore. None of us, particularly myself, wanted to leave Tiruvannamalai since *darshan* of Bhagavan would then be denied. We ventilated our grievance to Bhagavan. He gave me a benign smile. A few days after, strangely, the transfer order was cancelled!

I noticed the strange way in which the doubts in one's mind got answered. The doubt you had would mysteriously be got expressed by someone else in the hall to Bhagavan and He would not only give the answer but look at you with a smile as if to say, 'Has your doubt been cleared?'

Bhagavan would be seated like a rock with eyes open for hours together and silence would pervade the hall; and everyone's heart would be filled with peace and stillness. This silence was His real teaching!

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Taleyarkhan, Firoza (1898-1984) was born in Hyderabad. Her father was in the service of the Nizam of Hyderabad. She belonged to an affluent Parsi family of Bombay, and had spiritual inclination since her childhood.

I was in Buddha Gaya for doing *sadhana*. I had wonderful experiences, but my heart was longing to meet a person who could show me God. One day someone told me about Ramana Maharshi. The moment I opened the book given to me, I was struck by the beauty of his face.

I first visited Tiruvannamalai in 1937. At that time I was planning to open an *ashram* in Bombay to be called 'The Home of Devotion'. I thought that before embarking on the venture I should have blessings of the Maharshi. I stayed at the Ashram for four days and showed him the blueprint of my proposal. I left the Ashram thinking that I had his blessings, as it was not his way to say definitely 'yes' or 'no' when people told him about their schemes. But to my great surprise, I received a reply from the government refusing to rent us the land and building on Khandivli Hills, which they had promised us. I really lost my temper with Bhagavan.

It was only much later that I understood that I had had his grace all along.

Meanwhile, a Polish lady [No. 194] came to the Ashram and told Bhagavan that she was working hard to collect money to help people in distress and asked him whether it was a good thing to do. Bhagavan took out a copy of *Kalyan Kalpataru* [a monthly journal of the Gita Press, Gorakhpur] and showed her a passage to read. As I was sitting beside her, I could read it too, and it made me smile. Bhagavan looked at me and said, "It is for you too." The passage stated, "A frail woman who knows how to find God's peace through prayers can do more to help a country or mankind than all the intellectuals put together."

That very moment something within told me that the Maharshi was right. He knew that I was not ripe for the responsible work of helping others. I needed to cure myself before I cured others. For the first time I got up and prostrated before him and from that moment my life, mind and heart changed and I felt his unbounded Grace flowing over me.

Once the *sarvadhikari* asked me to go to Madras and see Minister Bhaktavatsalam about the possibility of getting railway connection to Tiruchuzi, Bhagavan's birthplace. I went but was shocked to hear how much it would cost. I decided to leave it to Bhagavan and thought no more about it. But imagine my joy, when years later Bhaktavatsalam became the Chief Minister of Madras and the line was actually constructed. Bhagavan's Grace is sufficient to accomplish anything, big or small, if one's life and soul are laid at his feet. He has brought about many seemingly impossible things for me.

I had his Grace when T.H. Tarapore, a Parsi friend, took up my plan to renovate the Patala Linga, an underground cavern, where Bhagavan had sat performing austerities as a youth when he first came to Tiruvannamalai. He did this beautifully and C. Rajagopalachari [No. 192], the then Governor-General of India, performed the opening ceremony on May 14, 1949.

[In this regard the following has been recorded by Taleyarkhan in her book[1]: That evening All India Radio broadcast a recording of the function. When it was over, Bhagavan said with a sigh of relief that for three or four days he was moving in dread lest I should pick him up and take him to the function. What an opportunity I had missed, I shouted, but Bhagavan motioned me kindly to resume my seat and said, he was much relieved.]

For over a week after the *mahanirvana* I was quite desolate at

missing the physical presence of Bhagavan. I did not know what to do. Between tears, thoughts of ending the life often came to my mind. One afternoon as I lay asleep, I saw Bhagavan coming down Arunachala with his stick and enter my house. He asked me, "Why are you weeping?" and bade me wipe my tears assuring me he was always with me here. Then he went out by the opposite door. This dream is yet vivid in my memory and were I an artist I would have drawn a picture of the scene.

Some Muslim servants of mine, who protested to the presence of the photo of Bhagavan, have been granted the vision of Bhagavan. Now they not only do not protest but have themselves become his devotees.

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1. *Sages, Saints and Arunachala Ramana* by Bhagavan Priya Ma F. Taleyarkhan, Orient Longman, 1970.

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Shankarlal Banker, a close associate of Gandhiji, was imprisoned with him for printing the latter's controversial articles in 1922 in *Young India*, of which he was the printer. A recent publication records:

In 1934, Shankarlal met a high-ranking serving officer of the German Air Force and a member, besides, of the German aristocracy. In the course of their conversation the officer wondered whether he had heard of Ramana Maharshi, who, he said, was a rare personality, and suggested that he could visit him.

In 1935, during his visit to Madras, Shankarlal chanced to meet the editor of *Sunday Times,* M. S. Kamath, a great devotee of Sri Ramana, who agreed to take him to the Maharshi. Shankarlal joined other guests and visitors in the hall where the Maharshi was present. He had plenty of things on his mind. But in the hall, all anxieties seemed to vanish and, as recorded by him, "I had the feeling that I was that 'pure Brahman' and the words '*Sivoham, Sivoham*' [I am the Supreme Being] raced through my mind. I was astonished at this phenomenon." He wondered whence came those thoughts, considering that he was not a very spiritually-inclined person. To his surprise, he experienced a feeling of "extraordinary self-confidence" and felt convinced that the experience was real.

As he took leave of the Maharshi he experienced a great deal of peace and encouragement. Later that month, he narrated his experience to Gandhiji, who not only expressed his joy but also suggested to him that on the next occasion he should stay longer at the Ashram.

In the summer of 1936, Shankarlal once again found himself in the presence of the Maharshi. This time he made bold to ask the Maharshi: "What books should I read for spiritual progress?" The reply startled Shankarlal. "Books? Why books?" the Maharshi queried and repeated the words, "Why books?" Then the Maharshi added, "Make your heart pure and you are bound to see the light!" That was to make a lasting impression on his mind and he kept thinking over it during his entire day's stay at the Ashram. On the train that was to take him to Madras, he later recorded, "Around 4 a.m. I suddenly woke up and saw the picture of the Maharshi floating before my eyes! I opened my eyes fully, rubbed them, and wonder of wonders, I felt as if he was standing before me… I had a continuous feeling of exultation and joy as if there was no need to think or have any anxiety about anything in the world!"

He again reported this experience to Gandhiji who recommended that he visit Tiruvannamalai more often. Gandhiji also told him, "After listening to you, I have suggested to Rajendra Babu and Jamana Lal Ji also to go there." [They can be seen in a group photo (no. 17) in the book, along with the Maharshi.]

Shankarlal was back in Tiruvannamalai in 1937. This time he took with him pictures of famine-stricken people in Tirupur, Tamil Nadu. He was seated in the hall along with others as Sri Ramana was talking of Self-realization and the bliss of the soul. This distressed Shankarlal who had seen starving people in Tirupur. How, could, he wondered aloud to his friend Dr. Syed [No. 23], who was sitting next to him, one reconcile misery with the bliss of the soul? And he showed him the photographs of starving people, he had brought with him.

Dr Syed did the unexpected. He went over to the Maharshi and placing the pictures in his lap said, "This gentleman here says, when there is so much misery in the world, how can we think of the bliss of the soul?" Instead of being fazed by the question, the Maharshi replied gently that while all effort should be made to help those in distress, one should not take individual credit for the act. The Lord alone was the saviour of the people. The Maharshi added that he has seen people who had not eaten for two or three days and they seemed to glow with some inner joy. Where did that joy come from? Only the Almighty could give it to

them! When Shankarlal retrieved the snapshots and looked at them again, he was to observe what he had not noticed before! Those poor starving people engaged in breaking stones seemed to have smiles on their faces! For Shankarlal it was a revelation.

Shankarlal met the Maharshi the next day quite unexpectedly. This time he wondered how marvellous it would be if the Maharshi and Gandhiji met. To which the Maharshi replied with a soft smile, "Distance does not exist!" When Shankarlal next visited Wardha, he repeated this conversation to Gandhiji who said, "Haven't you understood? Distance does not exist the way we think. I have written on the subject only three days ago!" Gandhiji called for that article and read out to him what he had written.

In 1939, when Shankarlal's health deteriorated, he was advised to devote himself to a life of *manan* and *chintan* – meditation and contemplation, and withdraw his mind from all mundane activities, which he found difficult to practise. Here again, Sankarlal got direction from the Maharshi when he watched him engaged in cleaning and chopping vegetables in the kitchen. He noticed that the Maharshi was going about his work with remarkable expertise. He even heard the Maharshi telling a devotee how to slice a pumpkin skillfully! It was, thought Shankarlal, a lesson for him, too. Do a job, do it well, and do it with complete detachment!

He could not resist waking up the next day at 4 a.m. and go to the kitchen. This time he heard Sri Ramana asking someone in Tamil, "Is Banker there?" When he was told that Banker was present and sitting outside, the Maharshi came out with a ladle full of cooked lentils and looking quizzically at Shankarlal, invited him to taste it. "It is a bit hot. But I cooked it myself," said the Maharshi by way of explanation. Shankarlal tasted it and exclaimed, "Why, it is very tasty!" At that the Maharshi broke into laughter and went back to the kitchen. Shankarlal got the answer to the problem that was bothering him, about engaging himself in some activity even while involved in spiritual pursuits. Wasn't the Maharshi telling him by example that to be working actively was as important as searching for spiritual bliss?

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K. Venkatarathnam (1921-76), an Andhra, had a religious bent of mind since childhood. After his sacred thread ceremony at the

age of seven, he never failed to repeat Gayatri mantra even for a day. He was advised by a religious teacher to go to Tiruvannamalai and serve Sri Ramana. The following account is as given by Rosner[1], who had come to Ramanasramam in 1968 and had diligently served Venkatarathnam till his passing.

When Venkatarathnam came to Ramanasramam in 1944, he happened to meet Prof. Shiva Mohan Lal [no. 156], whom he had known before. Lal introduced him to the Maharshi. He sat down and began his *japa*. But strangely he could not remember his mantra even though he had repeated it so many *lakhs* times before. Suddenly, he felt an infinite Expanse of Pure Consciousness, the *atma*, which lasted for some time. He stayed for a few days and returned to his place; all the way back in the train the same experience occurring again and again.

Later, when he came to the Ashram to serve Bhagavan, he worked at the bookstall and at the Ashram library. Bhagavan personally taught him how to bind books and also to read and write Tamil.

In 1949, Lal asked Bhagavan if Venkatarathnam could join as one of his personal attendants. Bhagavan said he had no objection provided the office gives the permission, which was given.

One day, Venkatarathnam quietly went behind the Maharshi in the hall and started fanning him, forgetting that he had earlier made it very clear that nobody need fan him. At this the Maharshi got angry saying, "Oho, very good, very special, this fellow thinks he is doing a great service. Why doesn't he go and fan all *bhaktas* and get the *punya* of fanning the devotees of the Guru." He spoke off and on like this to some devotees. Finally, when alone with the Maharshi, he broke down and asked Bhagavan to forgive him for having made Bhagavan exert himself so much to correct his fault. Bhagavan graciously said, "Never mind, everybody makes a mistake."

Bhagavan had a number of attendants, who would serve him in shifts. Venkatarathnam chose to have 10 p.m. to 4 a.m. shift. It was the time when he got his heart's desire fulfilled to be intimately close to Bhagavan. Many nights were spent in spiritual talk or simply gazing at the Divine face of the Maharshi.

At the sight of blood, while dressing the wound on Bhagavan's hand [*refer* no. 122, p. 297 about Bhagavan's illness], Venkatarathnam would feel faintness. Bhagavan rebuked him saying, "Don't come near me. You people come here thinking that Bhagavan is sick and is dying. I

don't want you to come near me if you have such thoughts." When he asked Bhagavan that without thinking that such and such thing must be done to relieve the suffering, how could he serve him, he was told that he should simply play his part as in a drama and do whatever is necessary with mental attitude of a witness attending to the work as the situation demands. Following Bhagavan's instruction he began to feel that everything was *atma vilasa* (the Divine play) and that Bhagavan was simply playing a role as a sick person, although in reality he was the *Paramatma* Himself.

After the *mahanirvana* of the Maharshi he would feel sad whenever he thought of the love and concern that the Maharshi had towards him and would sometimes weep. After the 10th day following the *mahanirvana* he left for his native place but continued to visit and serve at the Ashram.

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1. Neal Rosner, an American, got immersed into the spiritual heritage of India under the guidance of Venkatarathnam. This gets elaborated in his book *On the Road to Freedoom: A Pilgrimage in India*, Cassandra Press, P.O. Box 2044, Boulder, CO 80306. Rosner lived in Amritanandamayi's Kerala Ashram as Swami Paramatamananda.

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Swami Lakshman Joo Raina, who passed away in 1991, is recognized as the last living pre-eminent exponent of Kashmir Saivism.

When I was in the twenties, some one told me of Bhagavan Sri Ramana Maharshi. Then and there I left Kashmir and proceeded to Tiruvannamalai. As I entered the Hall, I saw Bhagavan seated on a sofa with his legs stretched. I was thrilled with joy. Bhagavan asked me to sit in front of himself. I sat and gazed at his Feet and entered the blissful state of *samadhi*. Those golden days were indeed divine.

One day, I was overjoyed by the nearness of Bhagavan and composed a few slokas as my offering to him. These in effect stated: "There are four types of body: the gross (*sthula*), the subtle (*sukshma*), the causal (*karana*) and the void (*sunya*). Transcending these (four types) is the great Hill Arunachala, which is praised as the form of the all-knowing Supreme. We worship Sri Ramana, who blissfully abides in

His own true nature (*swarupa*), which is named Arunachala, the foremost among the foremost of Hills. I take refuge at the feet of the great personage Ramana who had realized his identity with the Lord. I utter the name of the accomplished yogi Ramana, ceaselessly. I always contemplate on Maharshi Ramana, the realized soul. I offer my salutations to the celestial being Maharshi Ramana, whole-heartedly." When these *slokas* were placed before Bhagavan, he was so pleased that he explained them to the devotees who were seated in the Hall.

I used to go on Arunachala Hill with Bhagavan, where he used to sit on a rock and I would be seated at his Feet. Once a devotee took out a camera to take a picture of Bhagavan. At that time Bhagavan addressed me, "Lakshmanjoo! Lakshmanjoo! Sit here by my side. This man is going to take a picture of us." I cannot express how Divine were those days of my stay near Bhagavan and how kind he was to me.

I have received a copy of *The Mountain Path* (April 1983), where the photograph shows me seated near Bhagavan. Eleanor Pauline Noye [No. 11] is also seen in the group-picture. She shed tears of joy when Bhagavan asked me to sit near him. Those were golden days for me when I was near Bhagavan, my Divine Lord!

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Swami Rama (1925-96), a well-known spiritual figure, was the head of Karvipitham in South India, from 1949-53. He went to USA in 1969 and founded the Himalayan Institute to create a bridge between the ancient teachings of the East and the modern scientific approach of the West. He authored *Living with Himalayan Masters*.

Dr. T.N. Dutta, a prominent physician from Gajipur in U.P., came to see me at Nasik, where I was staying. He told me that he was very anxious to take me with him to Arunachala to have *darshan* of Maharshi Ramana. It was winter of 1949. My stay at the Ashram was brief, but very pleasant. During those days, Maharshi Ramana was observing silence. There were several foreigners staying in the Ashram.

In the Maharshi's presence I found something that is very rare and which I seldom found elsewhere. For those whose hearts were open

to that voice of silence, which was perennially radiating in the Ashram, just sitting near the Maharshi was enough to find answers to questions arising from within. It is true that to be in the presence of a great man is the same as experiencing *samadhi*. "He is the greatest and holiest man born on the soil of India within a hundred years' period," said Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. A glance of such a great man purifies the way of the soul.

According to the Maharshi, contemplating on the single query, "Who am I?" can lead the aspirant to the state of self-realization. Though this method of contemplation is the foundation stone of the philosophies of both the East and the West, it was revived again by the Maharshi. The entire Vedanta philosophy has been brought into practice by him. He has put the *Iliad* [1] in a nutshell: By knowing oneself one knows the self of all.

After five days' stay in the spiritually vibrant atmosphere of the Ashram, we came back to Nasik. My visit to Arunachala and the *darshan* of the Maharshi added fuel to the fire which was burning within me. 'Renounce, and you will attain': this echoed in my heart so powerfully that my stay at Nasik became more and more impossible. It was not easy for me to run away, abruptly leaving all the responsibilities – but one day the courage came to me, and I left Nasik for my Himalayan home.

I have firm conviction that no one can be enlightened by anyone else – but sages inspire and give inner strength, without which self-enlightenment is impossible. In today's world, human beings do not have any example to follow. There is no one to inspire them, and that is why enlightenment seems to be so difficult. Great sages are the source of inspiration and enlightenment.

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1. *Iliad* is a Greek epic poem attributed to Homer.

171

Swami Paramahansa Yogananda, a well-known spiritual guru, visited Sri Ramana in November 1935. He has authored *Autobiography of a Yogi.*

Before leaving South India, I made a pilgrimage to the holy hill of Arunachala to meet Sri Ramana Maharshi. The sage welcomed us affectionately and pointed to a nearby stack of *East-West* magazines.

During the hours that we spent with him and his disciples, he was mostly silent, his gentle face radiating divine love and wisdom.

To help suffering humanity regain its forgotten state of Perfection, Sri Ramana teaches that one should constantly ask himself: "Who am I?" – the Great Inquiry indeed. By stern rejection of all other thoughts, the devotee soon finds himself going deeper and deeper into the true Self, and the sidetracking bewilderments of other thoughts cease to arise. The illumined *rishi* of South India has written:

Dualities and trinities on something do hang,
Supportless they never appear;
That support searched for, they loosen and fall.
There is the Truth. Who sees that never wavers.

Swami Yogananda asked the following questions:

S. How is the spiritual uplift of the people to be effected? What are the instructions to be given to them?

M. They differ according to the temperaments of the individuals and according to the spiritual ripeness of their minds. There cannot be any instruction *en masse*.

S. Why does God permit suffering in the world? Should He not with His omnipotence do away with it at one stroke and ordain the universal realization of God?

M. Suffering is the way for Realization of God.

S. Should He not ordain differently?

M. It is the way.

S. Are yoga, religion etc. antidotes to suffering?

M. They help you to overcome suffering.

S. Why should there be suffering?

M. Who suffers? What is suffering?

No answer!

Two of the many questions asked by the swami's secretary C.R. Wright, were:

Q. How shall I realise God?

A. God is an unknown entity. Moreover, He is external. Whereas the Self is always with you and it is you. Why do you leave out what is intimate and go in for what is external?

Q. What is this Self again?

A. The Self is known to everyone but not clearly. The Being is the Self. Of all the definitions of God, none is so well put as the Biblical statement "*I am that I am*" in Exodus (Chap. 3). Knowing the Self, God is known. In fact, God is none other than the Self.

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Swami Tapasyananda, pre-monistic Balakrishna Menon (1904-91), was a post graduate and an erudite scholar. His translations include the *Gita, Adhyatma Ramayana, Saundarya Lahari* and many more. He was head of Ramakrishna Mission, Madras, for two decades.

The Maharshi impressed me as a rare type of man. **He simply seems to exist, without waiting for anything, without being anxious about anything.** [This reminded the Swami of the *Gita* where the Lord says about Himself, "Nor do these actions bind me. Like one unconcerned, I remain unattached to these actions." XI. 9]

The only activity of the Ashram in which he seems to take interest is cooking. He cuts vegetables and prepares some of the dishes for the day. Spicing and other processes of the culinary art are performed under his directions.

Another point that struck me is his silence. When I asked him to tell me something of spirituality, the first thing he said was that silence is the highest teaching! His idea is that the '*Advaitin* has no position to state, no *siddhantas* [theories] to propound.' He regrets that these days even *advaita* has become a *siddhanta*, whereas it is really not meant to be so. When I asked him about a book that I purchased in the depot there, how far the ideas stated therein are his teachings, he said, it was very difficult to state that, as he had no definite teaching.

He told me that he has absolutely no inclination to write a book; but due to entreaties of some people he has written some verses, and also added that he is often troubled by men who take a fancy to translate them into this language or that, and ask him about the faithfulness of the translation.

Mostly, the Maharshi remains silent. People come, make prostrations, sit before him for some minutes or hours and then go away,

perhaps without exchanging even a single word! I have got my own doubt whether people benefit by this teaching through silence. Yet people come from long distances to hear this dumb eloquence and go back *satisfied.*

Though he speaks but little, it is very instructive to watch his face and eyes. There is nothing very prepossessing about his personality, but **there is a beam of intelligence and unruffled calmness in his eyes, which are unique.** His body is almost motionless except when he occasionally changes his position or wipes his sweat in that hot place. I was carefully observing his face; I found him seldom winking and never yawning. I say this to show that I am sufficiently satisfied that the absence of activity in him is not due to inertness.

I stayed at the Ashram for three days. The Maharshi talked with me very kindly and quite freely on several questions I asked him. Although his manner of replying was not so impressive as I expected, his thoughts are always clear, concise and free from all ideas of narrowness. I am convinced that **he is a sweet and lovable person who is indifferent to all things about him, who has no end of his own to gain, who is always alert even when he seems to be most deeply absorbed, and who may be said to be perfectly free from greed and vanity. In seeing him I do believe I have seen a unique personage – a *jnani*, a perfect sage.**

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J.C. Molony, I.C.S., was a district collector in Madras Presidency.

I was strolling with my dogs on the hill, when I stumbled upon an *ashram*, a hermitage set in a cleft of rocks and overhung by trees. Water bubbled from a spring and gathered in a stone básin. I spied the hermit within, my dogs spied him too; and in a second three of them were all over him, while the fourth plunged with a splash into the coolness of the stone basin. I looked for a tempest of anger; hurriedly I prepared the best apology that I could think of on the spur of the moment. There emerged a tall, lean ascetic, smiling at me and my yelping companions. "You like dogs?" he said. "I love them myself, but I have sent them away from the summer heat. Why should not a dog like clean, cool water? No harm is caused by the dog jumping in the basin. Ten minutes after she is

gone, the basin will have emptied itself and filled itself afresh." So we sat together on the parapet of the *ashram* and looked down on the hot, dusty, town far below.

When I reached my camp one of my dogs was missing. In the evening arrived the holy man leading the truant on a string. "He came back to me, and I should have liked to keep him," he said, "but why should I steal him from you?"... As I write these lines, the fields before my eyes are white with frost; but my thoughts travel back to the kindly recluse on the sun-baked hill. You have learned that man adds naught to his own sanctity by affected disdain of God's dumb creatures.

174

T.S. Anantha Murthy, a judge from Bangalore, visited Sri Ramana in 1937. He later published *Life and Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi* (1972).

My wife and I entered the hall and felt awe as we stood and looked at the great sage. For about thirty minutes four Brahmins continued to recite verses from *Taittiriya Upanishad*. The Maharshi seemed to be listening to the recitation of the sacred verses. His mind was, as we could easily realize, absorbed within. I was astonished to see the sage keeping his eyes wide open without blinking for such a long period of time. I also felt that **Sri Ramana** who sat in front of me in such an engrossed manner, **was Brahman in human form and spiritual illumination was enshrined in him. He was not only august to look at but also an inspiring figure.**

That evening after the meal was over, the Maharshi picked up his stick and slowly walked into the hall. As I was eager to talk to him, I went behind. He sat down on the sofa. A petromax lamp was illuminating the hall. There was no other devotee. This was the opportunity I was longing for, which by his grace became available without any effort on my part. There was no need to draw his attention. The merciful sage lifted up his face and smiled slightly. He did not utter even one word, nor made any gesture. However, his gentle smile gave me sufficient courage to address him.

With folded hands, I said, "Sir, I do not know Tamil. Please permit me to talk in English. I have not been in good health for some months.

Dyspeptic troubles are the cause of my suffering. Doctors have failed to cure me. My eyes are always burning and I feel giddy now and then. I have come here to obtain your blessings." Sri Ramana heard these words patiently, lifted up his serene face and said, "All your troubles will disappear of their own accord."

These were the nine English words uttered by him in his mellow voice. I was filled with delight and gratitude on hearing the blessing so readily bestowed upon me by the great sage. I felt transformed. I prostrated to him and left the hall with my heart filled with joy and relief, and returned to the guest room. It was a memorable occasion indeed. My long cherished desire to obtain *darshan* of Sri Ramana had been fulfilled. In addition, within a few hours after I had set foot in Ramanasramam all my bodily troubles ceased to torment me as a result of the great blessing so readily bestowed upon me by the merciful saint.

During my ten days' stay, one day when practising meditation in the hall, I could not concentrate the mind in spite of my best efforts. Desirous to know the way to surmount the difficulty, I approached the sage and said in English, "Bhagavan, my mind is not steady today. What is to be done?" The great sage raised his head and recited verses 5 & 26 from chapter VI of the *Gita*.[1] After quoting the verses, the sage, in his infinite mercy, said in English, "These two verses contain the needed instructions. All efforts must be made to become effortless." He then closed his eyes.

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1. These, in brief, state that one should raise oneself by one's own efforts and that we are our own friend and our own enemy. From whatever cause the unsteady and restless mind wanders, it should be brought to control in the Self.

175

Suzanne Alexandra, born in Paris in 1896, was in the quest for Truth from an early age. When 18, she joined the Theosophical Society. A talented dancer and a doctor, she came to India in 1925 to attend the annual Theosophical convention at Adyar, where she met a Buddhist monk and became a Buddhist nun. Based on a newspaper article she visited Sri Ramana in 1936. After marriage she became Sujata Sen. She ran a free clinic for the poor in Tiruvannamalai for several years.

She was guided to the Maharshi by Raja Iyer, the postmaster of the Ashram. She found the hall decorated and furnished in a simple way. A frieze of blue flowers ran along the walls. A clock hung on the wall facing the devotees. Below it, on a shelf, were a few tin containers. She saw Maharshi take some nuts out of a container for the squirrel that had run to him. Next to the couch was a revolving bookcase and further down two cupboards holding more books and a small store of stationery. No attempt had been made to create a mystical or spiritual background for the Maharshi, yet the setting could not detract from the grandeur of the sage. **He was exceptional in just being himself.** In every action he did, whether he was correcting a manuscript or reading a letter, there was complete naturalness and absence of pose. This is very rarely seen elsewhere.

The Maharshi ate very frugally. He asked Suzanne whether the food was not too pungent for her. These words of solicitude were the first words he spoke to her…The Maharshi did not give any discourses. He replied to questions put to him, usually very succinctly, as if to let the one word or the few words he said make their way directly into the understanding of the questioner. On the other hand, when a young man struggled to grasp what the Self was, the Maharshi with great patience guided him through his reasoning until at last he got some glimmering of what the Maharshi meant. Apart from these exceptions to silence, there were long quiet moments when the Maharshi said and did nothing, but which were more effective in conveying the transcendent Truth than any lecture or sermon would have been.

The evening session in the hall began with the recitation from the Vedas. As the powerful Sanskrit syllables vibrated in the hall, the Maharshi's appearance underwent a remarkable change. His expression became austere, his gaze inward. **His face appeared translucent as if lit by an inner illumination,** whilst the constant slight trembling of the body had now stopped completely. Yet even in this state it was evident that he was not oblivious of his surroundings, and he had an awareness of both the inner and outer reality…**The Maharshi is an Adept of the highest order, a king of Yogis. The splendour of his Realization radiates like a sun. He lifts you far above the world.**

When ladies had to leave the Ashram at sun set, Suzanne refused to do so, considering it an act of discrimination, and to register her protest she declared that since she could not stay at the Ashram, she would go

and spend the night at the Hill. She climbed the Hill somewhat afraid of the wild animals and found a small cave for her stay. Her anger drove all other thoughts from her mind. It was then that she had a vision of Arunachala as a Hill of Fire, and she saw many worlds existing within the Hill. [Another devotee, S.N. Tandon records a similar experience in *The Mountain Path* of April 1970.] To protect Suzanne from the wild animals, the Maharshi asked Cohen [No. 37], who knew her when at Adyar, to persuade her to come down. Without further protests she agreed to spend the rest of the night in a hotel room in town.

Suzanne was for long associated with the idea of a Master-Disciple relationship through formal initiation, which was never done by the Maharshi. In 1945, she decided to go to Swami Ramdas [No. 81], to be his *shishya* (disciple) in a formal way. She sorrowfully mentioned about her departure to the Maharshi, who kept quiet. But then something strange and wonderful happened, for she saw the Maharshi as Dakshinamurthi, the great silent guru. [*Refer* annexure-V, p. 415] As she would write, "When I was talking to him, his appearance changed and I thought that Dakshinamurthi was sitting before me. In the silence I heard, 'There is no separation, all gurus are one. They are the indwelling Self of everyone. I shall ever remain as the Jewel shining in the lotus of your heart.'" [In a group photo with the Maharshi, Suzanne can be seen clad as a Buddhist monk. *The Mountain Path*, Aradhana, 2003.]

176

The anonymous chronicler, a B.Sc. final year student, met Sri Ramana in 1946.

I bowed down and sat in the hall before the Maharshi. There were many people present but the hall was quiet. I was unable to continue sitting in a quiet manner, but did not know what to speak to the Maharshi. There were a few books on a stand near the Maharshi. I picked up one of them and began to read. The book had concepts such as "Being is one", "The world is unreal." I could not understand them as my knowledge was confined to science. I could not help feeling confused on the following line of thoughts: "Why should God create me? Where was I? Where will I be? Is all that I see false? I do know the presence of objects before me. Don't I see the Maharshi sitting before me?"

I could not read the book any more and fell into a contemplative mood. Just at that time the Maharshi addressed me thus: "What is the doubt?" I raised my head and said, "There is a human figure on the sofa. There is one on the floor. With my eyes I perceive these two very clearly. But you say that in reality there is only One. How can that be true?" The Maharshi smiled and kept quiet. After a few minutes he said, "You must be used to performing experiments in your laboratory. If you are examining an object, the amount of details would depend upon the quality of the instrument you use to examine the object. Now, even if your instrument is fine, but your eyesight is poor you will know little about the object. If the eyesight is good but the brain is not normal, the object's true nature will not be known to you. Again, if the brain is fine but if the mind does not pay attention to what you are observing, the less you will know about the object. In brief, the amount you know about an object is dependent on an entity called mind.

What is mind? It is thoughts. All the thoughts spring up from a single thought. This thought is 'I am-the-body' thought. It has two components. One is the body and the other is I. The body being of transient nature, is subject to change, and it depends on external factors for its existence, such as food. But the nature of 'I' is different from that of the body. What exists in truth should be existing always. The body does not exist all the time, so it is not the truth. The 'I' exists in all states including waking, dream sleep, and deep sleep. Hence 'I' is the truth; body is untrue. Both of these combined can not exit as one entity. How can night and day, light and darkness co-exist? Similarly, there is no entity that has as its basis the co-existence of 'I' and the body. So 'I am-the-body' thought has no basis in truth. If we examine the world with this untrue thought as the basis, how can we learn the Truth?"

At that moment, I felt the foundation of my knowledge being shaken up, and my conviction in scientific pursuit as providing the ultimate fulfillment suddenly disappeared. Further, the Maharshi said that one can realize the truth about the world, after knowing the Truth about oneself. The *upadesa* I received changed my mental attitude and, subsequently my daily activities. I pursued life in the same environment I had before, but looked for life's fulfillment in the spiritual path, blessed by the Maharshi. I felt that the grace of the Maharshi allowed me to lead a harmonious life.

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P.L.N. Sharma, a Gandhian, met Sri Ramana in 1932, when he went to Tiruvannamalai to attend a conference of co-operative organizations.

In the subdued light of the hall **Bhagavan's body shone like burnished gold and his eyes were luminous,** full of flashes of some very intense inner life. The more I looked at him, the more **his face seemed to be radiating a mysterious light**, the source of which was somewhere deep within. I could not make out whether he was aware of the world or not, whether he saw me or not, whether he was in some yogic trance or contemplation of something quite beyond my vision and knowledge.

The hall was full of silence, serenity and peace. About twenty people sat on the ground, apparently in deep meditation. When the bell rang for midday meal, the Maharshi invited us all with a nod of his head and we followed him to the dining hall.

Next morning, I sat facing the Maharshi. A government officer accompanied by his retinue entered the hall and at once started telling Bhagavan how corrupt the government servants were, how they abused and misused their positions, how he had been entrusted with the task of cleaning up the government machinery and in his anxiety to make a success of himself, he had lost his peace of mind and had come to Bhagavan to make him calm and contented. It was clear that he thought of himself to be a very important person whose request must be promptly met. After he had finished his long oration, he looked expectantly at Bhagavan as if saying, 'Now it is your turn to show what you can do.' Bhagavan did not even look at him. The clock was striking hours, but Bhagavan was completely silent. The officer lost patience, got up and said, "You are silent, Bhagavan. Does it mean that you want me to be silent too?" "Yes, yes", said Bhagavan, and that was all.

One day, all the delegates to the conference for which I had come to Tiruvannamalai, went in a body to the Ashram. The president of the conference said, "Bhagavan, we are all social workers and disciples of Mahatma Gandhi. We have sworn to devote ourselves to work for the removal of untouchability. Be gracious to tell your view on the subject." Again there was no reply. One could not even make out whether he had heard the question. Time was passing. The delegates were getting tired

of sitting quietly. When the situation grew embarrassing, Yagnanarayana Iyer, principal of Pachayappa College, Madras, got up and said, "Bhagavan our question concerns worldly life. Perhaps it was improper to put it to you. Kindly forgive us." "There is nothing to forgive", said Bhagavan quite readily and with a bright smile. "When the ocean is surging and carrying away everything before it, who cares what are your views or mine?" The delegates could not find much sense in the answer. Only the great events years later gave meaning to it.

I was told that in Bhagavan's presence doubts got cleared without the need of questions or answers. Nothing of the kind happened to me. On the three previous days I tried to catch his eye, but could not. On the fourth day I managed to address him, while he seemed to be looking into the infinity of space, "Bhagavan, my mind does not obey me. It wanders as it likes and lands me into trouble. Be merciful and tell me how to bring it under control." Bhagavan looked at me affectionately and spoke most kindly, and his words sparkled with meaning, "All religious and spiritual practices have no other purpose than getting the mind under control. The three paths – Knowledge, Devotion, and Duty, aim at this and this alone…The path of Devotion is the easiest of all. Meditate on God or on some mental or material image of Him. This will slow down your mind and it will get controlled of its own accord." I felt satisfied, and there was deep peace in me when I looked at him for the last time.

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B.C. Sengupta, M.A., B.L., Principal, K.C. College, Hetampur, Bengal, came to Sri Ramana in early 1940s.

My visit to Ramanasramam coincided with the Maharshi's birthday. He was seated in a big enclosure outside the hall. A continuous stream of people passed before him for a couple of hours. I waited and waited and went closer, but could not attract his attention. My whole being was irresistibly getting drawn towards him. I was eager to put my case before him, but was not getting an opportunity to do so.

On the third day of my visit I entreated an inmate of the Ashram to help me put my case before the Maharshi. As advised by him, I wrote down what I intended to say on a piece of paper. He kindly took the paper and went to the hall, followed by me, and placed it before the

Maharshi, speaking something to him in Tamil. The Maharshi read it and smiled. I was sitting there. As he looked at me I was overwhelmed and a violent emotion convulsed my body, which set the Maharshi laughing. He laughed merrily for sometime and then silently folded the paper and left it on the book-shelf, which stood nearby. He did not speak to me nor did he seem to pay any further attention to me. This made me very depressed. There was nothing more to be done. I must return home. After the night meal I sat in the hall and felt a pleasant coolness inundating me. Is this the spiritual fragrance spoken of as emanating from the Maharshi? [*Refer* Brunton's experience, p. 14]

The next day, while sitting before the Maharshi, I experienced a sudden pull in the region of the heart. I was astonished and as I sought to observe it, it passed away. On the fifth day of my stay I thought that I have obtained what I deserved and that nothing more would be gained by a further stay at the Ashram. I wrote my intention to go home and placed it before the Maharshi. He read it and kept it aside. I felt it was yet another rebuff.

Next morning, I attended the usual prayers. Some discussion was going on in the hall. As they were talking mostly in Tamil, my attention was not attracted till I found some persons turning their heads and laughing at me. On enquiry, I learnt that they were discussing the subject matter of my note to the Maharshi. Though I was the laughing-stock, I was still glad to find that the Maharshi had taken notice of me. As I was in the back row, they asked me to come nearer to the Maharshi. The discussions over, I heard the Maharshi say, "He is concentrating on the reflection and complains that he cannot see the original." It struck me forcefully. What did he mean by the reflection and what was the original? I shut my eyes and tried to find the meaning. Immediately I felt a pull in the region of my heart. My mind was completely arrested – stilled, but I was wide awake. Suddenly, without any break in my consciousness, the 'I' flashed forth! It was self-awareness, pure and simple, steady, unbroken and intensely bright, but as much brighter than ordinary consciousness as is sunlight brighter than the dim light of a lamp. The world was not, neither the body nor the mind – no thought, no motion; time also ceased to exist. I alone existed and that I was consciousness itself, self-luminous and alone, without a second. Suddenly, without any break in my consciousness, I was brought back to my normal, ordinary consciousness.

A great miracle had been performed in broad daylight in the

presence of so many people, without their knowing it. No argument of the greatest philosophers and scientists of the world will now make me doubt the possibility of experiencing the 'I' in its pure state or pure consciousness, without any subject-object relationship. I, an insignificant creature, wallowing in the mud of mundane existence, and without any *sadhana*, being granted this supreme experience !– an experience which is rarely obtained even by great yogis after austerest spiritual practices strenuously performed for ages together. **Such is the wonder of His Grace – immeasurable and unfathomable Grace!** Truly it has been said – "Unasked Thou give, this is Thy imperishable fame."

As soon as I was brought to my normal consciousness, I opened my eyes and looked at the Maharshi, but he appeared to be quite unconcerned, as if nothing had happened. He was not even looking at me. How could he have performed this miracle? Who can comprehend? The experience so much amazed me that I even forgot to express my heart-felt gratitude to the Maharshi. I could not at that time even properly evaluate the supreme experience, which caused a very cheerful mood in me. I felt completely carefree.

I stayed at the Ashram for a few more days. The thoughts of home did not trouble me any further.

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C.R. Rajamani, associated with the printing business at Madras, first visited Sri Ramana in early 1940s.

I was in my early twenties when I first had *darshan* of the Maharshi. I saw him seated on a couch. A cast-iron charcoal brazier was radiating a comfortable warmth, and a pleasing aroma of the incense thrown into it at regular intervals was pervading the entire hall. About thirty people were seated on the floor facing the Maharshi. None spoke or even whispered. What struck me was that no one seemed to show even an inclination to talk. Some were meditating with closed eyes.

Sri Ramana's body was luminous like burnished gold. He was clad in his usual *kaupinam*, with a small towel across his chest. He appeared to be occasionally dozing off and had to steady his head often. He frequently stretched his palms over the fire and massaged his long fingers. In spite of his apparent dozing, his eyes did not look drowsy. On

the contrary, they were extraordinarily bright and alert. He was not looking at anybody in particular. I felt I was in the presence of an extremely affable person with a lot of natural grace, at perfect ease and without any pretension whatsoever.

I saw a white-skinned boy of about ten years sitting a couple of feet to my left. Next to him was a white man, presumably his father. Further to my left, was a white woman, whom I thought was the boy's mother. I then saw Bhagavan's eyes alight on the boy for a brief minute. I thought it was just a casual look. The boy was all the time looking at Bhagavan with a sort of fixation, as if on the verge of asking a question. But, no! He broke into tears. A cascade of tears came gushing out of his eyes. They were not tears of pain, for his face was radiant with joy. I could see that Sri Bhagavan's glance, though only resting on him for a brief moment, had opened in the boy's heart a veritable reservoir of pure joy.

I learned that the boy had come along with his parents, who had come to attend the Theosophical Society's convention at Adyar, Madras. The boy's parents arranged a trip to Tiruvannamalai, but he stoutly refused. However, he changed his mind at the last moment and did make the trip. Within an hour of his face-to-face meeting with Sri Bhagavan, his mental barriers were reduced to nothingness. He shed tears for quite sometime and later said to his mother, "I am so happy. I don't want to leave his presence. I want to be always with him!" His mother was most upset. She pleaded with Bhagavan, "Swami, please release my son! He is our only child. We will be miserable without him." Bhagavan smiled at her and said, "Release him? I am not keeping him tied up. He is a mature soul. A mere spark has ignited his spiritual fire." Turning to the boy, the Maharshi said, "Go with your parents. I will always be with you." He spoke in Tamil throughout, but the boy understood him fully. He bowed to Bhagavan and reluctantly left with his parents.

Whenever I recall this incident, it creates a feeling of being very near to something truly Divine. Of course, I have had my own share of Sri Bhagavan's grace in my later years. I have also had some ever-fresh visions which I dare not devalue as creations of a fevered imagination for they have strengthened my faith in Bhagavan. Some of them occurred decades after Sri Bhagavan's *mahanirvana*. They have been firm confirmations of his continued Presence and reassurances of his immortal words: "They say I am going! Where can I go? I am always here!"

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Rajalakshmi was the granddaughter of Venu Ammal, who was the younger sister of an outstanding devotee Echammal (no. 60). She lives in Chennai with her son.

On the death of my mother, my grandmother was completely devastated, unable to bear the loss of her only daughter. She walked all the way from Tiruvannamalai town to then distant Ramanasramam at 11 p.m. on a dark, lonely night. She cried uncontrollably and fell at Bhagavan's feet. The *sarvadhikari* of the Ashram, Bhagavan's younger brother, objected to her falling at the feet of Bhagavan for a worldly reason. To this Bhagavan countered by asking, if he would have objected to his sister Alamelu doing the same thing in a similar circumstance. Bhagavan shared her grief in his inimitable way and consoled her.

I first saw Bhagavan in 1923 when I was three years old. My grandmother, who was serving at the Ashram, took me along with her every morning, returning home in the evening. Once, I was playing 'cooking' game by offering small pieces of stones as cooked rice to Bhagavan, and I asked him to eat them. Bhagavan readily put those stones into his mouth and pretended to eat. When my grandmother objected to it, Bhagavan replied that the child was happily offering him the stones as food and he did not want to disappoint her.

Once, when seated next to Bhagavan in the dining hall, I asked my grandmother to serve me more of a particular preparation. She declined. When she was about to serve more of the same preparation again to Bhagavan, he refused on the ground that what was applicable to the child was applicable to him.

Bhagavan taught me Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit starting from the alphabets. He also taught me arithmetic. The first Sanskrit *sloka* he taught me was from *Upadesa Saram*. Eventually I learnt all the thirty *slokas* and recited them before Bhagavan, who was very pleased. Bhagavan presented to me a copy of the book *Ramana Vijayam* by Suddhananda Bharati [No. 101] after writing my name on it. The book also tells the story of Bhagavan's stay at Patala Linga. Being curious, I visited that place in Arunachaleswara temple, but I could not go inside due to bats flying around and the stinking smell from inside. I told Bhagavan about my experience and asked how he could stay at a place like that for such a long time. His reply was that he was not aware of his stay there

and that he came to know of it from others. This shows he was completely oblivious of time and space while inside Patala Linga.

In my school, children used to play *kolattam* (a game using two wooden sticks). I did not have the sticks to play. My grandmother was not willing to spend two paise (1/32 of a rupee) for the sticks. When I told Bhagavan of my problem, he asked his attendant Madhava Swami, to get a branch from a tree, out of which he made two beautiful *kolattam* sticks and presented them to me.

Somebody told me not to address Bhagavan as '*Thatha*' (grandfather). Bhagavan replied that as I was at the Ashram since childhood, there was nothing wrong in calling him '*Thatha*'.

In early 1950, when Bhagavan was very ill, I was at Lucknow. My grandmother, who was working at the Ashram, asked Bhagavan's permission to visit me and then go to Kasi. Bhagavan told her that when she took a dip in the Ganges at Kasi, she could perform the ceremony on his behalf too. After staying for a few days with me she went to Kasi and while taking a dip in the evening, thinking of Ramana, somebody told her to look up. She saw a large bright star trailing its light across the sky. And this happened at the exact time of Bhagavan's *mahanirvana.*

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Sab Jan (M. Abdul Wahab), was closely associated with Sri Ramana as his classmate in 4th , 5th and 6th forms at the school in Madurai. Sri Ramana was very fond of this Muslim boy and addressed him as Sab Jan.

Venkataraman was very learned in Tamil and stood first in the class. He was particularly well-versed in aphorisms of Tamil grammar. Our Tamil Pandit John Balakrishna was very fond of him. He was not very good in English. In other subjects he was above average. In general, he was not much interested in his school books. He was very fond of playing games, particularly football.

Even as a student he was very religious, and would go round the Subramania Swamy temple with fervent religious ecstasy. He used to take me with him several times and make me go round the temple saying, "God's creation is alike. God is the same; the apparent differences in gods are created by men."[1] Because of such universal outlook implanted

in me by him in those days, I could become an ardent devotee of Sri Varadaraja Perumal of Kancheepuram. For 12 year I partook actively in the *Garuda seva* by giving a shoulder to lift the deity of Perumal, while going in procession in the streets of Kancheepuram.

When Venkataraman disappeared it was a shock to me that he did not tell me about running away from his home. I was enlisted in the police department. In 1903, in one of the shops at Uttaramerur, I was surprised to see a portrait of Venkataraman, but completely different in appearance. I was anxious to know how the shop-man happened to possess the photo. I was told that this was 'Brahmana Swami' living in Tiruvannamalai and that the Swami was in *maunam* then. I was eager to meet my old friend and went to his abode. He was pleased to receive me although he did not speak. He simply nodded his head with a radiant face. I was thrilled to meet my classmate, who was all the more beautiful and resplendent with a mark of saintliness.

Again I went there when I was Inspector of Police at Tirupathur. At that time I was very sad, as my father had passed away. Sri Ramana showed me his mother's tomb, which consoled me. I understood from his action that death was inevitable as far as the body was concerned. After that I went to see him many times and on all occasions he gave special attention to me and introduced me to whoever was present on the occasion. He used to make me sit by his side while taking food in the dining hall, which, later I came to know, was quite unusual with him.

I was transformed into being a devotee of Bhagavan from being his friend. This inward change brought about by him is the greatest boon he has showered on me. He manifested his greatness once through a dream in which he showed signs of my wife passing away and in a mysterious way consoled me and prepared me for the shocking incident. It did take place very soon, and my wife passed away as predicted. But by the grace of Sri Maharshi it did not affect me very much.

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1. J. Jayaraman of Ramanasramam noted how Sri Ramana had the idea of *sarva dharma samabhava* (all religions are basically same) long before his 'death experience' and long before he sang verses 4 and 5 of *Arunachala Ashtakam*.

182

Dhiruben Patel of Bombay, a popular novelist of Gujarat, had re-

ceived Sri Ramana's guidance in 1940s. When she visited the Ashram in 2007, she agreed for a video graph of her experiences.

My mother was badly shaken at a tragic misfortune in 1944, when by brother met with a drowning accident witnessed by her from the shore. Chhaganlal Yogi [No. 55] suggested her to visit the Ashram. When she saw Bhagavan she was so much impressed that she came back to take the whole family to the Ashram. At that time I was 18 [now 81].

I had no interest in Bhagavan or his *darshan*. As I could not defy my mother, I bowed to him with folded hands and closed eyes. But as I raised my head, Bhagavan looked at me and in that very second I was annihilated totally by his gaze. I didn't exist any longer and there was a great sense of release and peace. I felt a soft moon light around me, with no boundaries and barriers. It was as if I was lost in a sky of light and peace. I don't know how many minutes or seconds I was in that state; it seemed a life-time. When I came back to my material existence, I could not accept what had happened.

We stayed five more days and I had Bhagavan's *darshan* many times, but that experience never got repeated. The event, however, made me think very deeply and continuously: What was it? And how could I be in that state constantly?

One day during our stay, we along with other devotees were watching Bhagavan going for his walk on the hill after lunch. Suddenly, my two-year-old nephew left us and caught hold of Bhagavan's walking stick. Everybody was aghast. The child was called back again and again and asked not to bother Bhagavan. He just wouldn't listen and went on staring at Bhagavan. But as soon as Bhagavan put his hand on his head, he let go of the stick and started weeping, not loudly, but tears were streaming down his eyes, while he just stood looking at Bhagavan.

I saw Bhagavan again in 1950. There was a heavy bandage on his arm and people filed by, single file, quietly. When I came near him I couldn't help saying, "Bhagavan call me again". With infinite compassion and immense love he looked at me and said, "Sari, sari."[O.K.]. Now I have come back after 57 years, and I am sure that he has called me. It is a very strange thing that I do not feel the absence of Bhagavan. Perhaps it is because during all these years I have always felt that he was near me. I have at some level communicated with him, and have received his grace. When you are facing a big problem and you do not know where to

turn or what to do, then Bhagavan really gives the answer in your heart of hearts. I may be anywhere, Bhagavan is always with me, and it is all due to the first wonderful moment when he had looked at me.

My mother used to rent a cottage near the Ashram, stay for two or three months at a time, and meditate very regularly. What she experienced, she spoke little. Back home, once she suffered a paralytic stroke and was not able to speak. After a month or so her speech came back but it was halting. Everybody was depressed about it. One evening I happened to recite one or two lines of *Upadesa Saram* to her. Mother picked up the recitation and concluded the thirty verses without a single mistake. After this she was able to recite Bhagavan's other works and slowly became normal. In her last illness she made me promise that Bhagavan should be with her when she goes and I was to be responsible for this request. And by God's grace and Bhagavan's blessings it so happened that during her last moments we could hold a big framed photograph of Bhagavan before her eyes. She quietly gazed at it, slightly turned her face and passed away.

183

K. Vithoba Kamath (1924 -), a Gandhian, is an agriculturist. He lives in Brahmavar, Karnataka, with his son.

I had read about the Maharshi from an article by M.S. Kamath, and later when I read his book about the Maharshi, a magnetic attraction arose in me to see him. Visiting the Ashram in 1946, I beheld the Maharshi in the hall. I felt that he was not in any way attached to or connected with anything around him. **He radiated spiritual splendour through sublime silence.**

I used to sit in the hall in the last row. One day, an idea flashed that I should see Lord Krishna. I intently looked at Bhagavan and saw a dark cloud engulfing him and within that emerged the Lord. I was at my wit's end. I thought it was a hallucination and a projection of my own mind. I wanted to try again. This time I thought of Gandhiji. Ramana was nowhere, but in his place there was Gandhiji. Being bewildered, I looked at Bhagavan. There! He was looking straight at me with a benign smile on his face. I felt highly blessed.

Prior to my departure, I took courage to sit near Sri Ramana.

Being the morning hour, there were few visitors. I verily felt vibrations emanating from him which thrilled me. I asked Bhagavan with much hesitation as to how to control the tossing of the mind. He simply looked at me but didn't give a reply. I thought it was not proper on my part, a raw graduate, to have asked him. Meanwhile Devaraja Mudaliar [No. 35] came and sat by my side. Bhagavan, though he knows English, rarely replied in that language. He asked me through Mudaliar, as to who was asking this question: "Is it you or your mind?" I replied, "It is my mind." Bhagavan's response was, "Mind is a bundle of thoughts. See who you are, then these oscillations of the mind cease to exist."

In the dining hall, I had the fortune of sitting in the row opposite to Bhagavan. The Maharshi would observe the leaves of all and direct the servers (mostly ladies) to restore any shortfall. He would take a small quantity of food and mash it well with his fingers.

I remember well, as if it just happened today, the figure of Bhagavan Ramana returning from his walk on the hill, radiating spiritual aura, with eyes glittering like live stars, emanating bliss. Decades later, the scene of that uplifting influence is still so fresh and inspiring.

184

T.V. Kapali Sastri (1886-1953), a born scholar, belonged to Chennai. His family was known for its Sanskrit scholarship. He mastered four languages – Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil and English. He received inspiration from Sri Aurobindo, Sri Ramana, and Ganapati Muni, who was his guru. At the instance of the Muni he first met Sri Ramana in 1911-2.

What a meeting it was! The very first day wrought a remarkable change in my being. No amount of *tapas* or *japa* would have given an indubitable knowledge of spiritual consciousness and a correct appreciation of the truth of spiritual life which the Maharshi gave me.

The personal attraction of the Maharshi was irresistible. But I found his teaching too direct, *immediate*, seemingly simple, having no step in between, i.e., the starting point and the goal; at any rate not practicable to people circumstanced like myself.

When the Maharshi was on the hill, he used to take a few of us with him for the *giri-pradakshina*. This used to last from 9 p.m. to 4

a.m. Once, while I was going with him he pointed his face towards the sky and said, " Look, there perhaps are the *siddhas*. They (people) say they are *nakshatras* and pass them by." As we walked on, he observed that the very stars were beneath his feet. During one such round in May 1922, we got news that supervisor Ramaswami Iyer [No. 94] was taken ill suddenly and was dying. The Maharshi went to the place on the Hill where Ramaswami was lying and was having violent palpitations of the heart. The Maharshi sat near him, placing his hand on his head. Within five minutes, Ramaswami got up and was quite normal.

In 1930, when I went to the Ashram with Sunder (S.P. Pandit), the Maharshi asked me to have a look at the Sanskrit rendering of a Tamil work by Lakshmana Sarma [No. 63]. It was very imperfect, and after hours of struggle I could finalize only a couple of verses. How to complete the remaining 38 verses or so within the limited time haunted me. In the evening, as soon as the Maharshi came to his seat, he asked me to take up the work. It was amazing that within two to three hours I finished almost all the verses. Later, Sunder told me what a magnificent and inspiring sight it was to see the Maharshi sitting with his blazing eyes transfixed on me all the while. He added that the Maharshi's face and head looked inordinately big during the time.

When I came to the last portion, I looked up and the Maharshi asked me, with an exclamation of joy, "So, it is finished?" I answered, "Yes, but the last verse does not come off in this particular metre." "Does not come in that metre?" queried the Sage and sank into silence. Within a moment a strong upward movement gushed up from beneath the navel, somewhere from the root of the spine, involuntarily a verse came out like a cry from my mouth. It was the verse in the required metre!

The Maharshi was very particular about the food requirement of the visitors to the Ashram. On the *jayanti* day, he did not take his meal till the last man had had his food. When I asked him about this, he said in effect, that when as a boy he set out from the house to Tiruvannamalai, he had to starve for days together. And so he has been very particular that nobody should suffer the pangs of hunger as he did.

When a visitor observed that devotees described him an avatar of Lord Skanda, the Maharshi replied, " Who am I to object or assent to what people may say?"

Once a hunter was about to kill a peacock on the hill. When the Maharshi forbade him to do so, he brushed aside his words saying, "Go Swami, who is asking you?" The next day, it would appear, the man had

an accident and his very arm had to be cut off. "I felt sorry for him," said the Maharshi speaking of it, "but what is to be done? People have to go through these things before they would learn."

185

Atmakuri Govindacharyulu, a known freedom fighter of Andhra Pradesh, first visited the Ashram in 1944-45.

One day as I was dwelling on the name of Rama I heard 'Ramana, Ramana.' The sound was pleasant. I don't know why it gave me great joy. The yearning to see him grew day by day. Finally one morning I reached the Ashram and went to the hall. I joined my hands, prostrated and stood up and began to reflect, 'How is it that this head which had bowed to none but Mahatma Gandhi has prostrated?' The mind which had worshipped only Rama, becomes subdued here! It is inexplicable!

I sat down on the floor near the Sage's feet and began to gaze at his countenance. Five minutes passed. Suddenly he turned his gaze upon me and I could not stand it. My hair stood on end and an unknown force began to rise throughout my frame. I prayed, 'Thou alone art my refuge!' Later, when introduced to the Sage, from the depth of that placid human statue a smile emerged that seemed to say, 'Don't I know him?' That smile, mingled with that look of grace, stirred me deeply, and made me tremble like one who has passed through blazing fire. I could not bear to look at that face radiant like the sun.

The Maharshi is an ocean of peace. Whoever sets eyes upon this sea or sits near it even for an instant, cannot fail to taste supreme peace, their mental movement held, be it only for a while. Such is the grace of this transcendent yogi, such is his motiveless activity. Whoever gathers at his feet, he will not fail to shed on them at least a drop from his unfathomable ocean of tranquility. He will not fail to shower on them the transcendent seed that ends the ego and yields peace. He waters the fields of their hearts with the elixir of devotion that passes unperceived from his heart.

His handwriting is like a string of pearls. The style and the exposition of the Truth are outstanding in his poems. What is impossible for the perfect adept who has grasped the essence of all sciences? **He**

knows everything. I offered him my book *Govinda Ramayana.*

I stayed for three days and only once or twice a day I heard him speaking. **He rules all through silence.** On the third day of my arrival, I drew near the sea of love and prostrating said, "I take leave, bless me." He looked at me and nodded his head in assent. I stood transfixed, arrested by the power of that look. I came out of the Sage's hall with peace in my heart. I said to myself, 'I am blessed.'

186

Keerai Patti – the first lady to supply food to Sri Ramana on a regular basis.

Regarding Keerai Patti[1], Sri Ramana says, "Even when I was in Arunachaleswara Temple, she was staying on the hill [in the *mandapam* of Guhai Namasivaya Temple] and was visiting me now and then. After I went to Virupaksha Cave [in 1899] she began coming to me frequently.

"She used to go out before sunrise, wander about the hill and bring back leaves useful for cooking. She would cook them tastefully, bring me a handful and persuade me to eat. She never failed to do so even once. Sometimes I used to help her in cooking by going to her place and cutting the vegetables. She had great confidence in me. She used to go to the town daily, obtain rice, flour, *dhal* and the like by begging at various houses. Once in a while she would prepare gruel with flour and *dhal* and bring it with vegetable curry, saying, '*Sami, Sami*, yesterday one good lady gave me a little flour. I have made some gruel *Sami*.'

"When she could not find any vegetable she used to sit depressed. On such occasions I would climb the tamarind tree and pluck some tender leaves for her. She was thus somehow supplying me food everyday. She had great devotion. Even when eighty, she used to wander about all over the hill.

"Once, at midnight a thief got into her place and was trying to get away her things. She woke up and cried at the top of her voice, 'Oh, Annamalai, Thief, Thief.' Her cries could be heard at Skandasram, where I was. I shouted back saying, 'Here I am. I am coming. Who is that?' So saying I ran down in hot haste. Hearing my shouting the thief ran away."

It was believed that she was born later as cow Lakshmi. (*See* annexure –IV, p. 414)

1. In Tamil *Keerai* means green leaves and *Patti* means grandmother.

187

Padma and her husband Venkataraman, trustees of T.M.P. Mahadevan (No. 25) Trust, Chennai, are devotees of Sri Ramana.

With my husband I went to see Bhagavan in 1947. After prostrating we stood near him. I said, "Bhagavan I want *atmasakshatkaram*" [Self realisation]. Bhagavan looked at me and smilingly asked, " *Appadiah*?" (Is it so?). The way Bhagavan asked me took my breath away. It was so charming. Then my husband said, "She wants to stay here permanently." Bhagavan did not say anything but looked at me steadily pouring forth his grace.

I used to sit in the hall spellbound for many hours; such was his power. While engaged in meditation, old memories would well up in my mind and disturb the flow of meditation. I wanted to find a way out to quench all the *vasanas*. One day I got an opportunity to put my problem before Bhagavan. His reply was, "You be the subject instead of the object, then the *vasanas* would not trouble you any more." This suggestion and his grace worked for me.

Once at 4 a.m. I went for *giri pradakshina* alone. When I had earlier sought Bhagavan's permission before proceeding on my circuit, he had told me to be careful. I did not feel any fear till I reached Adiannamalai. Then I remembered what Bhagavan had said, and felt sudden fear. At that time I saw somebody walking in front of me. It looked like Ammani Ammal, one of the devotees known to me. I called out her name loudly, but probably she could not hear me and kept on walking. When we reached Esanya Lingam, it was broad daylight, and to my amazement, I could not see the lady. Even now, when I think of Bhagavan's grace in sending someone when I needed, and withdrawing the company when I no more needed it, I simply shed tears.

188

D.S. Sastri was an official of the then Imperial Bank of India. It was at his behest that his sister Suri Nagamma (no. 39) wrote 273

letters to him during 1945-50, about happenings at the Ashram. These are a treasure trove to any Sri Ramana devotee.

I had my first darshan in 1941, when I was on transfer from Cochin to Ahemdabad. As I was mentally worried, I thought of going to Tiruvannamalai and obtain some solace from the sage. Some years earlier, a friend of mine had asked me to accompany him to the Ashram, but I had refused as my experience of so-called holy men had been unfortunate.

Having nothing particular to do, I strayed into the bookstall. Bhagavan, while returning from the bathroom, stopped near there to talk to someone. The attendant pointed him out to me; a thrill went through my whole body. What a difference from the swamis and holy men I had seen before! That lustrous body, those shinning eyes, that beauteous smile, that gentle speech and halting gait – all took me by surprise.

Later, on entering the hall, the ego in me did not permit my prostrating before him. Instead, I just folded my hands by way of *namaskar* and sat down, watching critically all that was happening. The prevailing serene atmosphere was infectious. I sat motionless. I was lost in wonder and admiration at the peace and silence. The thought uppermost in my mind was: if people could be happy thus with a minimum of food and clothing, why not I? Why grieve about official worries and domestic calamities?

In the afternoon, when I sat before Bhagavan during *Vedaparayana* in the open space adjacent to the hall, and the chanting of the Vedic hymns began in those idyllic surroundings, I felt that I was in another world altogether. It was only when the chanting was over and devotees began leaving that I realised I was in this mundane world.

After supper, when Bhagavan came back from a short walk, he sat on an easy chair in the open space between the hall and the well. One of the few devotees present, asked him about an incident in the *Yoga Vasishta*. Instead of just explaining it, he began narrating the whole story at length. The pleasant way he spoke, the simple language he used and the dignified manner in which he related the story captured our hearts and kept us all spellbound. At the end of it, the devotees told me that I was particularly lucky because Bhagavan rarely spoke much or for such a long time. I felt extremely happy and gratified.

That night my wife and I fully agreed that we had reached our haven and found our real guru. Thus began our attachment to Bhagavan and the Ashram.

189

Sankarananda, an Andhra, was an officer in the police department.

As a result of a long practice of mantra *japa*, he attained *mano-laya*, i.e., stillness of mind. He lost interest in all worldly things and could not attend to his duties either in the office or at home. He used to come and see Bhagavan often. Once he came to Bhagavan on a six-month leave. He sat in the hall and soon lost outer consciousness. One day, even after the lunch bell was rung he sat unmoved. Bhagavan brought him back to consciousness by giving a mild push with his foot and took him to the dining hall.

Since *mano-laya* would not lead one to the ultimate Truth, Bhagavan asked some senior resident devotees to take him to the temple in the morning and to Samudram lake in the evening and engage him in one way or another throughout the day and talk to him about the path of self-enquiry, thus preventing him from relapsing into *laya*. For many days this process of keeping him awake in the daytime continued. After sometime, by the grace of Bhagavan he became normal. At the end of his leave he returned home and began to lead a normal life. He also earned a promotion.[1]

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1. It was Sankarananda who later took the *sarvadhikari* to Burma to procure teakwood for the Matrubhuteswara temple.

190

Seshadri Sastrigal, who studied at the Ashram Veda *Pathasala*, served in the dining hall.

Once when I was serving buttermilk to Bhagavan, I found I had no more left with me. Bhagavan asked me, "Could you get some more buttermilk for me?" This was very unusual as Bhagavan had never asked for a second helping. I went into the kitchen, got some more and served him. After tasting it he said, "There seems to be some difference between the buttermilk you served me earlier and this." As I did not know the answer I went to the kitchen and asked the cooks. They told me that the buttermilk served later was intended for the servants. Bhagavan asked,

"Why not the same for everybody?" From next day onwards, everyone was served the same buttermilk.

During the rationing days, boiled wheat used to be served to the devotees, instead of rice. One night, instead of wheat, rice was served on Bhagavan's leaf. When the *sarvadhikari*, who happened to be present, was asked by Bhagavan as to why he got rice and others wheat, he said, "Wheat is not good for Bhagavan's health." Bhagavan retorted, "Oho! Are you a doctor? Serve me the same as is served to others. Make no discrimination."

191

M.S. Nagarajan, a staunch devotee, belonged to Polur Taluk in Tiruvannamalai district. Even as a young boy, he used to accompany his parents to the Ashram.

His friend, who was a nephew of the great devotee Echammal [no. 60] spoke to him about the greatness of Bhagavan. In 1930, when 15 years old, he came to the Ashram and was allotted the work of *puja*, help in the kitchen and bookstall, etc. But what he valued most was the privilege of cutting vegetables and grinding pulses in the kitchen along with Bhagavan.

At the end of six months, Nagarajan went home but soon returned and stayed for four years. He records: In 1932, I was in charge of the daily *puja* at the Mother's shrine. A devotee called P.W.D. Ramaswami Iyer arranged a special food offering of *sarkarai pongal* (a kind of rice pudding) and *vadai* (a small round cake of black gram fried in oil). I had many things to do and there was no one to help. So I got up very early, took my bath, removed old flowers from the shrine, swept and cleaned the floor and lit two fires, one for *pongal* and the other for *vadai*. I then sat down to grind the black gram which I had soaked the previous night. I had not prepared *vadai* previously any time. I took some dough and tried to spread it out on a leaf to form a round *vadai*, but it would not come out properly. I tried again and again without success. I got annoyed and disgusted. The next moment I noticed Bhagavan standing behind me and watching my effort to make *vadai*. He said quietly, "It doesn't matter. You have added too much water while grinding the gram. Now make round balls of the dough and fry them. They will be *bondas*."

When the *bondas* were served, Ramaswami Iyer said to me angrily, "Look here. Did I not ask you to prepare *vadai*?" I was afraid to say anything and so merely looked at Bhagavan. He immediately turned to Iyer and said, "What does it matter? If the cakes are flat they are *vadais*, if spherical, *bondas*. The stuff is the same and the taste is the same. Only name and forms are different. Eat *prasadam* and do not make a fuss." Everyone was astonished at Bhagavan's apt reply. Later in the day, when Ramaswami saw me he remarked how lucky I was to get support from Bhagavan himself.

One day, a letter came from Nagarajan's mother informing him that a job had been found for him. This letter came to the hands of Bhagavan along with the Ashram post. After reading it Bhagavan said, "Look here, a job has been found for you. Go and accept it immediately." Tears came from his eyes at the thought of parting from Bhagavan, who said again, "You can go on Wednesday and join duty on Thursday." Most reluctantly he left the Ashram, and came later as often as he got leave.

192

C. Rajagopalachari, former Governor-General of India, was a well-known Congress leader of India.

I first visited the Ashram in January 1936. Besides Indian devotees of Bhagavan, I found some foreign devotees also seated in the Hall. I was struck by the high spiritual atmosphere of the place surcharged with deep silence; Bhagavan radiating love and simplicity.

I am a person belonging to the *Visishtadvaita* [qualified *Advaita*, expounded by Ramanuja] school of thought. Being impressed by Bhagavan I asked him how to reconcile it with the *Advaita* school. After a pause, Bhagavan said, "You have to workout your *karma* anyhow and you are saved." Ever since I have been pondering over that *upadesa* and felt benefited.

The *moolasthanams* [sanctum sanctorums] of temples are places where saints lived and had visions of Him. The Ashram is such a place and I feel convinced that the aura that was there continues today.

193

T.S. Narayanaswami, a professional from Madras, went to see Sri Ramana just two months before the *mahanirvana*.

Ramana Maharshi was a seer such as those born on this earth once in a millennium. My cousin and I went to see him compelled by sheer curiosity; we had no desire for spiritual advancement. We had heard that the Maharshi was afflicted by sarcoma on his arm and he was bearing the pain without any sign of suffering. In the opinion of the doctors who attended on him, any other person would have been crying aloud with pain, characteristic of this malady.

We entered the hall with a feeling of wonder and curiosity, as we wanted to have a look at this remarkable man of God. We took our seat along with other men. At seven in the morning appeared the tall, frail frame of the Sage. Clad only in a loin cloth, with an indescribable radiance on his face, he seated himself on a raised platform. Cries of *Annamalaikku Harohara* (Hallowed be the Lord of Arunachala, Siva) went up in the air as he took the seat.

He then cast his glance over every member of the audience. Seated by my side was the chief minister of Mysore, K.C. Reddy, who was a great devotee of the Maharshi. The entire gathering sat still for about fifteen minutes in pin-drop silence. Then suddenly something within impelled me to rise from my seat, proceed to where the Maharshi was seated, and prostrate myself for a second and a third time before I resumed my seat in the rear row of the audience. I still remember the Maharshi nodding his head twice and casting his loving and gracious look at my face, which was suffused with awe and reverence. To me it was like Dakshinamurthi [*See* annexure-V, p. 415] Himself sitting before me, speaking to me through His benevolent eyes in solemn silence, a silence that was truly eloquent. I could feel a thrill, an ecstasy, and the calm of the great peace that filled the heart!

We took leave of the Ashram and with a wrench of the heart made our journey to Madras where the humdrum life of cares and anxieties awaited us. Looking back with nostalgia, our visit to the Ashram and the *darshan* of the Maharshi turned out to be the most fortunate happening and the most momentous event of our lives.

194

Uma Devi, a Polish lady (Wanda Dynowska), converted to Hinduism, has authored *The Teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi*, which attracted seekers from Poland to Sri Ramana. She translated the *Gita* into Polish. She started a publishing house that printed many Indian texts in Polish. She was a frequent visitor to the Ashram.

She told the Maharshi about her vision of Siva and asked him as to how it could be everlasting. Sri Ramana told her that a vision depends on the subject. It would appear and disappear. The value of the vision is the same as of the 'seer'. A vision can never be eternal. Therefore enquire 'Who am I?' Sink deep within and abide in the Self.

When she asked as to how to effect it as quickly as possible, the reply was: There is no question of time. Surrender to Him and abide by His will, whether he appears or vanishes, await His pleasure. If you ask Him to do as you please, it is not surrender but a command. You cannot have Him obey you and yet think that you have surrendered. He knows what is best and when and how to do it. Leave everything entirely to Him. His is the burden, no longer you have to have any cares. All your cares are His. Such is surrender. This is *bhakti.*

Or enquire to whom these questions arise. Dive deep in the Heart and remain as the Self. One of these two ways is open to the aspirant.

Think of the man who sees only the cloth and not the cotton of which it is made, or the man who sees the pictures moving on the screen in a cinema show and not the screen itself as the background; or again the man who sees the letters which he reads but not the paper on which they are written. The objects are the consciousness and forms. The ordinary person sees the objects in the universe but not the consciousness in these forms.

One cannot see God and yet retain individuality. The seer and the seen unite into one Being. There is no cogniser, nor cognition nor the cognised. All merge into One Supreme Siva only.

195

Prof. D. Gurumurthi came to see Sri Ramana during his last days.

On the day of our visit, we found Sri Ramana walking a few steps to the verandah with great effort. His body looked extremely weak, pale and limp. He could scarcely stand the weight as he moved forward. But the moment he ascended the seat and settled down for one-hour public *darshan*, a marvellous change came over him. It was as though he was summoning the spirit to dwell visibly in his body. His face shone radiant with peace. It was a marvel of conquest over the body.

As devotees advanced to the presence of the Maharshi and bowed down in utter faith and fervent dedication, vibrations of power could be felt. At every bow a wave of devotion would flow towards the sage, and there would come a powerful flood of benediction from him to the devotees on the ground. A veritable miracle was being performed. An aged body bent down by terrific penances, exhausted and enfeebled by a mortal illness, and yet the immortal spirit of the emancipated sage triumphed over the weakness of the body, which was resplendent and shedding benign grace on the assembled devotees. Few among mankind have had the great privilege of participating in such a spiritual feast.

When I sat in the evening session of *darshan*, a question formed in my mind. What will happen to the hundreds who will be deprived of this spiritual nourishment? As I was mentally addressing this question to Sri Ramana, radiance was felt by me. His physical form before me gradually became shrunken, smaller and smaller and vanished into radiance. As the radiance grew deeper and more powerful, I felt I had the answer to my query. Even though the body may disappear, concentration of spiritual power which was focused round it will continue to shed its influence. And as long as one can put oneself into attunement with that form and with that radiance, one would draw spiritual sustenance.

196

Gouriammal visited Sri Ramana in Virupaksha cave as a child with her father, an earnest devotee. She lived in her house in Ramana Nagar, opposite the Ashram.

When I asked Bhagavan what I should do to be on the spiritual path, he said, "Do what you want to do but keep doing it; don't remain doing nothing. Repeat the name, or think deeply or seek the source of your 'I' consciousness, do *atma vichara,* but keep working on yourself.

This is very important."

Once a well-meaning but ignorant devotee insisted that Bhagavan should take the glass of orange juice that he had brought. Bhagavan said. "If you give anything to me without giving it to all, it will be like poison to me." When the devotee said that next time all would be given orange juice, Bhagavan said, "What is the use because I tell you? You should know by this time that they are all myself and what you give to them you are giving me."

Once my sister's five-year old son was bitten by a snake and in desperation she brought the child to Bhagavan. The doctors had given up hope. The boy was perspiring profusely and was in great pain. The child was already stiff with glazed eyes and was breathing heavily. The mother was weeping inconsolably. When Bhagavan saw her he said, "Do not weep. It is nothing." He passed his hand over the child and within a few minutes the boy recovered his senses and sat up. As the mother was leaving, she saw a Muslim devotee in front of the hall. By profession he was a snake charmer and a snakebite healer. He said, "Now the child is safe, but the poison is still in his body and I had better chant some charms to get it out." He did so and asked her to go. Bhagavan had saved the child but wanted the snake charmer to take the credit.

197

Krishnaswami was a native of Srirangam, Tamil Nadu. He came to Sri Ramana in 1936 and was his attendant till the *mahanirvana*.

There was a lame puppy which would wag its tail whenever Bhagavan went up the hill. He was fed with *iddlies*. One day after having *iddlies* the pup went and urinated in front of the *sarvadhikari's* office. He got wild and ordered that no more *iddlies* be given to the pup. When Bhagavan asked me why the pup was not fed, I disclosed the reason. He got angry and told me, "Earlier many have come, ruled and gone, one day you too have to go." And thus feeding of the pup got resumed. The same mongrel would come in front of Bhagavan with the mouth full of filth. Bhagavan used to wipe her mouth clean with his own towel and say, "Some great soul has come in this garb." He never gave me the towel for washing.

Bhagavan used to say with a laugh, "A person performs

namaskaram to the Swami and expects all his prayers fulfilled and boons granted. Who wants this *namaskaram*? Even before they prostrate physically, I prostrate to them mentally."

One day he told me, "One could cause God through alchemy. But even if that God tells you something don't believe it. If I come in front of you don't believe it. The Seer is most important. You are. That is most important. Concentrate on the Seer, not on the seen. All that you see is false and the Seer alone is true. All knowledge you gather is useless, until you hold on to your Self. *You are the Truth*, not what is being told to you, not what you see."

198

Thelma Rappold, an American, had come to India and travelled all over to find a guru. She landed in Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, where she learnt about Sri Ramana, and was with him during 1947-50.

On my way to Sri Ramanasramam, when I was in a state of reverie, Sri Ramana appeared to me as a sort of dream. When I actually saw him, it was the same face that I had seen in my reverie. I was really, really shocked. When I sat in his presence, I felt that my little ego had slipped away. I opened my heart and let those beautiful waves enter into me. It seemed that the so-called problems I thought I had, just vanished. I went through a cleansing process.

It always amazed me how Sri Ramana sat absolutely quiet and motionless, yet his eyes were so penetrating. When I had questions I did not verbalize them, because it wasn't necessary; the questions were answered almost immediately. It was our means of communication. It was a mind-to-mind connection.

When I first met Sri Ramana, he told me: You are what you are – accept it. When the time comes to give it up do it with grace. As the years went by, I kept trying to 'open' as much as possible. I recognized that we all choose our suffering because we do not open up and accept what life brings; we don't find out 'who' it is that is experiencing the suffering. I had never, at any pervious time in my life, really let go and tried to just 'be'. When we can do this, love just pours out.

At the Ashram I had found my true home and teacher. It was as

if I had lived several life times in those few years that I was with him. The person who came to him in the beginning was not the same person that left. I had understood how to open up the power locked within me.

199

Apa B. Pant was High Commissioner for India in U.K. He visited Sri Ramana in 1937 along with Maurice Frydman (no. 36).

I well remember the day Maurice and I reached Sri Ramanasramam. There was some festival and the Maharshi's hall was overflowing. We found a seat in a corner and fell silent. In a minute or two, I felt that there was radiance alight that was filling the whole hall. It was so quiet, so still. The impression was so indelible.

I had just returned from England after doing my course on philosophy, and thought I knew answers to the eternal questions. I wanted to put those before Bhagavan. But, somehow, in his presence, I did not feel like opening my mouth.

At night, as it was hot, we slept in the open. There was so much of turmoil and noise all around. The whole night it was impossible to sleep. In the morning I spoke to Maurice about it. He asked, "What noise? There was no noise whatsoever; everything was peaceful." I was stunned! I was sure I had not slept a wink and here was Maurice saying that there no noise at all. Then it dawned on me that Bhagavan had given me a message. He had spoken without speaking that the mind creates the noise and is chattering and arguing illusions and unless one goes beyond this turmoil there can be no living in Truth, or Liberation. He had given me in a flash the message that 'Awareness is all'.

The same evening, Maurice said to Bhagavan that I do *surya namaskars* [A type of physical exercise]. Bhagavan looked at me very straight and said, "Let me see how you do it." So, in front of all I did 12 *surya namaskars* with breathing and mantras as my father had taught me. Bhagavan smilingly said, "Yes, it is a good exercise to be done after you have been sitting for hours in meditation and your knees and other joints feel a little stiff." I never used to do any meditation at that time. But I know now [30 years later] that it were these words which kept me on the *surya namaskars* and led me to daily meditation.

200

Vaikuntavasar worked up his way to be Sri Ramana's attendant in 1940. Later he also was a member of the Board of Trustees of Sri Ramanasramam.

Before becoming an attendant, I had talked to Him only once, soon after my arrival. After that there was no need for me to think of anything else. Bhagavan was God for me. Everything I did for Him was done with care and dedication. I used to devote considerable time to wash the only two pieces of cloth Bhagavan had (loin cloth and a small towel), as I wanted them to be spotlessly clean. Massaging His feet was another duty I welcomed. Bhagavan's rheumatism gave me an opportunity to massage His feet and legs.

On great occasions like *jayanti*, Bhagavan would ask me, "Have you attended to the 'boys' (monkeys)?" I used to take plenty of food and spread it on the rocks. After they finished eating, the monkeys would keep quiet, lying down content, and Bhagavan would remark, "Look, how good they all have become and do not do any mischief now."

Once there was a snake below my pillow. When I reported it to Bhagavan, He laughingly remarked, "Oh, it is quite all right. What else can make a better bed for you?" Such was His sense of humour. [Vaikuntavasar is one of the names of Vishnu, whose bed is Adisesha.]

Once, about nine at night, Bhagavan walked towards the Hill. I went along with Him. Bhagavan had gone a bit further to ease Himself. Then I heard the sound of wooden sandals moving nearer and nearer and passing on. There was no one to be seen. I was awe struck. I had heard from Bhagavan about the *siddhas* living on Arunachala. I began to sweat. When Bhagavan came near me, He looked at me and said, "So, you too have heard it."

201

Saroja Krishnan's family had a close relationship with the Ashram. Her uncle, Rajagopala Iyer was one of the attendants of Sri Ramana. He had witnessed the will executed by Sri Ramana in 1938, in respect of Sri Ramanasramam.

When I was young I used to sit in the hall, watching with interest the happenings around me. One day, Bhagavan's eyes turned to me and rested there; my eyes were locked in his, unable to turn away. How does one describe the indescribable? Dark and wide, cool and bright, melting with mercy and kindness, those heavenly orbs seemed to expand and fill the room and all space, engulfing me. Looking back, I understand that this was his *nayana diksha* [Initiation by look].

When fifteen or sixteen, I was undergoing mental suffering. My husband was not in town. In despair, I tried to put an end to my life, but did not succeed. My uncle Rajagopala Iyer chanced to take the family to the Ashram. Even here my agony continued. The time came for us to return home. One by one, all members of the family prostrated and took Bhagavan's leave. When I raised my head after prostration, my eyes fell on Bhagavan's feet, placed on a low stool in front of his sofa. My hands shot forward as if propelled by some powerful force and I grasped those feet only for a very short time. A fount of happiness seemed to burst forth from somewhere deep within me. Wave after wave of bliss washed over me and I seemed to be floating in it. I was oblivious of everything else. Thoughts of Bhagavan and the surging happiness absorbed every nook and corner of my being. Back at home, even though the old situation continued, nothing touched me. In my lifetime I have never experienced anything remotely resembling it.

Back to Tiruvannamalai with my mother for delivery, I did not stop the daily practice of going round Bhagavan's hall 108 times, carrying the heavy load of advanced pregnancy. Medical facilities in Tiruvannamalai were rather inadequate. So my mother was anxious and decided to take Bhagavan's advice. With this in mind she was entering the hall, when she heard Bhagavan telling someone firmly and loudly, "No, no, not here." On hearing this my mother immediately decided to take me to Vellore. Bhagavan's advice was received, even though nothing was asked!

I was in the third day of my dry labour, without making much progress. The third night the doctors decided to do a Caesarean, often very risky in pre-penicillin days. My mother and others were in great distress on hearing this and sent off a telegram of appeal to the Ashram. Bhagavan read the telegram in Tiruvannamalai and in Vellore my son Ramana Kumar was born, by normal delivery. The doctors were confounded that a normal delivery should occur in such a difficult situation

without recourse to even the forceps!

Once, Bhagavan was coming down the hill after his morning stroll. Suddenly, a dove fell down at his feet. Bhagavan bent down and picking it up, cradled it in his arms and gently soothed it by passing his hand lightly over its back. Then he turned round to see how the bird happened to fall. A young hunter was hesitantly standing a little distance away with a catapult in hand. Bhagavan remarked in quiet voice, "This is the poor boy's food, but two *annas* [one eighth of a rupee] would do to buy something to satisfy his hunger." The amount was paid immediately to the boy by my uncle.

The dove lay still and dazed in Bhagavan's arms. It did not move ever after Bhagavan came back to the hall. "A few drops of green grapes juice applied on its head, would cure him." As Bhagavan was saying this, an out-station devotee entered the hall with a few bunches of green grapes, as an offering to Bhagavan. "Hey, look, we are just talking about green grapes and here they are!" exclaimed Bhagavan. Immediately, a few grapes were squeezed on the dove's head. In a short while, the bird stirred, raised its head and looked around. After a few tentative steps, it flattered it wings and flew away. Who is the vet who taught Bhagavan this treatment? I wondered.

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Shanti (pseudonym) visited Sri Ramana in 1943.

I had earlier sent a letter to the *sarvadhikari*, who took me to the dining hall where Sri Ramana had gone for his breakfast. He introduced me to Bhagavan, who welcomed me with a soft and affectionate look. I prostrated and when I got up he made a sign to take my seat nearby, and I did so. From the moment Bhagavan's eyes fell on me, my heart went out to him in spontaneous love and reverence. **The way he ate his food, the way he sat, the way he walked, the way he talked, were remarkably calm, and so very different from the manner of ordinary men. It was only now that I understood the significance of Arjuna's question to the Lord in the *Gita* [2. 54], regarding the *sthitaprajna*.**

At about 9 a.m. Bhagavan came to the meditation hall and we too entered the hall and sat facing him. For the first time in my life, I realized how dynamic *shanti* could be**. Peace seemed to emerge from**

Bhagavan and fill the hearts of one and all. In his presence, the mind became calm and tranquil of its own accord and consequently doubts and questions became few, and finally vanished. I was very happy. I felt *kritakritya* (one who has accomplished), and my heart softly whispered within me the words, '*dhanyoham, dhanyoham*'(I am blessed, I am blessed).

I had a desire to dedicate a Sanskrit stanza to Bhagavan, but my knowledge of the language was not so much as to compose a verse with any degree of confidence. In my heart I prayed for his grace to fulfil my wish. That noon, when I got up from my usual siesta, a stanza occurred to me. Apparently, without any conscious mental process, a poem was formed in my mind ready to be transcribed. My prayer had been granted. With great joy I wrote it down on a piece of paper, took it to Bhagavan and placed it at his feet. He read the stanza twice and asked me to put the words 'Sona Sailam' for the words 'Ramana Maharshi'. I changed the fourth line which read, "I meditate on Sona Sailam (Arunachala)". Thus Bhagavan revealed to me that he was none other than Arunachala or Dakshinamurthi [*Refer* annexure-V, p. 415], who by his sublime silence expounded to his devotees the mysteries of Self knowledge. At that time it struck me so and my eyes were filled with tears of delight and gratitude.

According to *Viveka Chudamani,* the flight of steps leading to *jivanmukti* begins with *satsanga,* the company of sages and saints. Our Bhagavan is such a soul. I think we are too near Bhagavan's time to see him in correct perspective of history. As years roll on, his spiritual grandeur will assume Himalayan proportions.

* * *

ANNEXURE – I

MOUNTAIN ARUNACHALA AND TEMPLE OF ARUNACHALESWARA IN TIRUVANNAMALAI

The great Arunachala hill on which Sri Ramana lived for more than two decades is in town Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu. The town itself is named after the mountain Annamalai, with the prefix Tiru / Thiru, which in Tamil is equivalent of Sri.

The word 'Annamalai' in Tamil means 'an inaccessible mountain'. 'Annal' is a special name for Lord Siva, who appeared in this place in the form of a column of fire, neither the top nor root of which could be approached, hence inaccessible. The mountain thus came to be known as Annal Malai (*malai* in Tamil means mountain). Slowly the word got corrupted to Annamalai. Paul Brunton (no.1), in his *A Message from Arunachala* writes that his geologist friend from America held the view that Arunachala was thrown up by the earth under the stress of some violent volcanic eruptions in the dim ages before even the coal-bearing strata were formed.

The hill which has a circumference of around 10 kilometer rises up to 3000 feet (approx) from the sea level at its highest point. [*See* photograph no.1 in the book.]

Arunachala is also known as Arunagiri. Sri Ramana explained that *aruna* means 'red', 'bright like fire'.This fire is the fire of wisdom (*jnanagni). Achala* or *giri* is hill. So, it means the Hill of Wisdom. Adi Sankara has declared it to be the legendary Mount Meru.

As noted in the life sketch of Sri Ramana at the beginning of the book, the very word 'Arunachala' had somehow fascinated Sri Ramana since his childhood. It was in search of Arunachala that he left his home. In the note he left behind, he stated that he was leaving in quest of his Father. To him Arunachala was no mere hill; it was a visible symbol of the Absolute Spirit. His poem, a favourite of his devotees, *Arunachala Akshar-amanamalai* means 'the bridal garland of letters for Arunachala'. It is a fine example of bridal mysticism (*Madhura bhakti)*. Here Sri Ramana employs the intimate language of love conversing with the Lord. He also pines for, cajoles, chides, and quarrels with his beloved Arunachala. The poem was composed by Sri Ramana in 1913, while he was making the 13 km circuit round the hill. This ritual known as *giri-pradakshina* continues to be performed with fervour by Siva devotees.

Sri Ramana once said: "Someone from abroad wants a stone from the holy part of the hill. He does not know that the whole hill is holy. The hill is Lord Siva Himself. As we identify ourselves with the body, so Siva has chosen to identify Himself with the hill."

ARUNACHALESWARA TEMPLE

As the name indicates, this is the temple of *Iswara* (God) of Arunachala, that is, Lord Siva. This is one of the biggest temples in South India and is over a thousand years old. The temple is truly marvellous in its construction. Its eastern tower (*gopuram)* goes up to 217 feet. [*See* photograph no.2 in the book.] The huge temple has numerous shrines, *mandapams, gopurams* and enclosures.

According to Sri Ramana's first biographer, B.V. Narasimha Swami, Sri Ramana after alighting at Tiruvannmalai railway station on the morning of September 1, 1896, proceeded straight to this great temple. When he marched to the innermost shrine there was not a soul beside him. He addressed Arunachaleswara (in the shape of *lingam*): "O God, obedient to Thy call, I have come deserting all." He stood there for a while in ecstasy and then left the sanctuary. The first few months of Sri Ramana's stay at Tiruvannamalai were spent in deep meditation at various places in this temple.

ANNEXURE – II

KARTHIKAI DEEPAM OR DEEPAM FESTIVAL

This grand festival, which falls during November-December each year, is attended by lakhs of people. The festival stretches over a period of ten days. On the tenth day of the festival, a huge Deepam (lamp) is lit at the top of the hill Arunachala. A large basin-like copper cauldron, kept on the summit of the hill, is filled with ghee. The light which is lit with great festivity at 6 p.m. is visible from a distance of almost 30 miles in all directions. In the early Tamil literature the phrase 'like a beacon on the top of the hill' was used as an illustration of widespread fame. This shows that the practice must have been in vogue from time immemorial.

The origin of this tradition can be traced back to the legend of Ardhanareeswara. According to the legend, the Divine Mother Parvati came to Tiruvannamalai and did penance to be united with Her Lord. Lord Siva was pleased with the penance, and appearing as a column of dazzling light took Her into Himself. This merging of Sakti into Siva is represented by the Ardhanareeswara (half woman and half man) form.[1] This event occurred on the

full moon day in the Tamil month of Karthikai, which generally runs from mid-November to mid-December. Ever since, it has been the practice to light a lamp at the top of Arunachala hill on this day every year, and worship the Lord.

According to another legend, the big cauldron is lit in commemoration of the episode of Lord Siva quelling the pride of Brahma and Vishnu by Himself appearing before them as a huge column of fire, which got consolidated as mountain Arunachala. According to a story in the *Sivapuranam,* once Brahma and Vishnu were arguing about their respective superiority. Suddenly they saw an endless column of fire beside them. They decided to find the limit of the column, agreeing that whoever reached the end of it would be superior to the other. Vishnu started to dig the earth to find the root, and Brahma flew in the sky to find the top. In due course of time, having failed in their mission, both returned to the earth. While Vishnu accepted his defeat, Brahma told a lie that he had reached the top and showed a flower, which he claimed he had got from Siva's head. Lord Siva appeared on the scene and rebuked Brahma for telling a lie. The huge column of fire, the form of Siva, eventually got frozen as mountain.

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1. In this manifestation, the left half represents Sakti in the form of Parvati and the right half Siva. The image of Ardhanareeswara gives a mistaken impression that it represents a being, which is half female and half male. In reality there is no such being. The symbolic representation of Ardhanareeswara is to be seen as a metaphor, which represents a being the whole of which is Siva and the whole of which is Sakti at the same time. Siva and Sakti are two beings only by connotation. They in fact denote one and the same being Siva. It is only when Siva is united with Sakti that He acquires the capability of becoming the Lord of the Universe. (Who is greater – Siva or Sakti ? *Refer* pp. 351-2.)

ANNEXURE – III

THE *PERIAPURANAM'S* STORY OF GREAT SIVA *BHAKTA* – KANNAPPAN NAAYANAAR

Periapuranam ***was the first religious book gone through by Sri Ramana. The book gives a moving account of the deep love, utter self-sacrifice and sublime communion with the Lord, which marked the lives of sixty-three Tamil saints. As he read on, says B.V. Narasimha Swami, the first biographer of Sri Ramana, "surprise, admiration, awe, reverence, sympathy and emulation swept over his soul in succession, thus paying a momentary homage to the grand ideals***

and ideas that had charmed the hearts and engaged the minds of his countrymen for centuries." The famous story of Kannappan Naayanaar from this book is summarized below.

The tribe to which Kannappan belonged engaged itself in hunting and practising cruelty on animals. The tribe had a chieftain named Naaga. He married a lady from another hill tribe. Their great and long-standing desire to have a child was fulfilled through worship at the shrine of Lord Muruga – son of Lord Siva. The child being heavy to bear in hands was hailed as 'the doughty one' [Thinnan], which eventually became his name.

He was such a daring and strong boy that one day he thrust his hands into the jaws of a tiger and came out unhurt. He also became a great expert in archery. As the chief of the tribe grew weak with the passage of years, Thinnan, a dedicated Siva *bhakta*, became the next chief. He and his tribesmen engaged themselves in fierce hunting. Once they had to face a roaring bear with sharp teeth. Thinnan decided to pursue it. The bear fled far away and stood at the base of a hill. Thinnan strode towards the hill where he found a Siva temple, which was being maintained by a local Brahmin.

Thinnan wanted to offer food and water to Lord Siva, but the only water he had was his saliva and the food was the animal flesh. Next day, the priest on his arrival was shocked to find meat scattered over the Lingam and he cursed the person who was responsible for the defilement. He cleaned the Lingam, went to take bath and came back. He worshipped the Lord in his usual way and went home. After he left, Thinnan worshipped the Lord again in his way.

The priest hid himself to find the 'culprit'. He saw Thinnan doing his usual worship with great fervour and devotion. In order to show the depth of Thinnan's worship to the priest, the Lord made blood come out of His eye. As Thinnan could not bear the sight of his beloved Lord suffering such pain, he pulled out one of his eyes and put it in Siva's image. Now the bleeding started from the other eye of the Lord's image. After losing his one eye Thinnan could see only with the other eye and so he put his left leg to mark the place of the eye in the image and then was about to pull out his second eye as well to put it in the place of the bleeding eye of the Lord, he heard the Lord's voice calling him to stop. And then as the Lord appeared Himself, both the priest and Thinnan fell at His feet. The Lord blessed them and restored Thinnan's eye.

Thinnan came to be known as Kannappan, which means one who gave his eyes to the Lord, and Naayanaars are great Siva *bhaktas* of yore.

(*T.K. Sundaresa Iyer records how Sri Ramana became sentimental and emotional and brokedown while enacting this story before the devotees in the hall,* Refer *pp. 286-7.)*

ANNEXURE – IV

THE COW LAKSHMI

The cow donated to the Ashram in 1926 was named Lakshmi by Sri Ramana himself. She died in 1948. She had nine deliveries in all, four of which were on the *jayanti* days of Sri Ramana. At the time of one such delivery, Sri Ramana's attendant Kunju Swami (no. 52) remarked, "It is auspicious that the cow has delivered the calf on Sri Ramana's birthday." Sri Ramana interrupted him to say, "Correct yourself Kunju, my birthday celebrations are taking place on the day Lakshmi has calved."

Sri Ramana would visit the cow shed regularly. Lakshmi also became greatly attached to the Maharshi and would, of her own accord, walk from her shed into the hall even when the hall was full of devotees. One day the cow came to the hall, put her head on the Maharshi's shoulder and wept. He gently stroked her head and said, "Who has hurt you? Stop crying. I am here to befriend you." Lakshmi stopped crying, gave the Maharshi a few licks and went away comforted. (*Refer* also p. 180.)

Lakshmi would walk into the hall from her shed a few minutes after the birth of her new calf and stand mutely before the Maharshi, who would then address her: "Lakshmi you have come to tell me that you have a new baby. I will come to the shed and see your child."

Lakshmi continued through the years as one of the favoured devotees of Sri Ramana. Whenever she visited Sri Ramana, he would pay attention to her, stroke her and feed her with plantains, rice cakes, etc. The possessive way in which she approached Sri Ramana and the attention bestowed on her made many devotees believe that there was some special bond between them in an earlier birth. It seemed hard to explain in any other way the great solicitude and tenderness that Sri Ramana always showed in his dealings with her. [*See* photograph no.12 in the book.]

Many old timers at the Ashram believed that Lakshmi was reincarnation of an old lady by the name Keeraipatti, who had known Sri Ramana from his earliest days in Tiruvannamalai and had occasionally prepared food for him almost up to her death in 1921. (Sri Ramana has also referred to the fact of reincarnation without committing himself.)

It is believed that Lakshmi brought a lot of luck and prosperity to the Ashram, a fact that was mentioned by Sri Ramana himself.

On the day of Lakshmi's death the Maharshi sat beside her, took her head into his arms and gently stroked her neck. He fixed his gracious gaze on her. She passed away peacefully and was given a ceremonial burial in the Ashram premises. A *samadhi* shrine built over the grave with her true-to-life statue

(though of a smaller size) is worshipped by the devotees to this day. An epitaph written by the Maharshi in Tamil verse confirms her *nirvana.* When a devotee asked the Maharshi whether the use of the word *vimukti* in the epitaph was conventional or it really meant *nirvana*, the Maharshi replied that it meant *nirvana.*

Other *samadhis* adjacent to that of the cow Lakshmi, are of the deer Valli (*Refer* p. 67 last para), the dog Jackie (*Refer* p. 272, 2nd para) and the crow (*Refer* p.307 last para).

ANNEXURE – V

DAKSHINAMURTHI
(The Great Silent Guru, an incarnation of Lord Siva)

It is said that Lord Siva manifested as Dakshinamurthi in order to instruct and enlighten four ascetics. In the traditional version of this story, He appeared in the form of a young boy sitting under a banyan tree. The four ascetics attained enlightenment as a result of receiving Dakshinamurthi's silent transmissions. A verse from Adi Sankara's *Sri Dakshinamurthi Stotra* goes on to say – "Look at the wonder under the banyan tree! While the disciples are old and grey-haired, the teacher is blooming youth. And though the Master's speech is simple silence, the doubts of the disciples are all resolved."

Dakshinamurthi means 'southward facing god', and one finds Lord Siva in this form on the outside of the southern walls of South Indian Siva temples. Sri Ramana devotees generally believe that the Maharshi was a manifestation of Dakshinamurthi. He took up residence on the southern side of Arunachala hills, identified himself with Arunachala Siva, and he always preferred to teach through silence.

The Maharshi has told the following story about Dakshinamurthi to Muruganar (no. 53).

When four aged Sanakadi *rishis* [Sanaka, Sanandana, Sanatkumara and Sanatsujata] first saw the youthful Dakshinamurthi sitting under a banyan tree, they at once got attracted to him, and understood that he was the real *sadguru.*

They approached him, did three *pradakshinas* around him, prostrated before him, sat at his feet and began to ask very shrewd and pertinent questions about the nature of Reality and the means of attaining it. Because of the great compassion and fatherly love *(vatsalya)* which he felt for his aged disciples, the

young Dakshinamurthi was overjoyed to see their earnestness, wisdom and maturity, and gave apt replies to each of their questions.

As he answered each consecutive question, further doubts arose in their minds and they asked further questions. Thus they continued to question Dakshinamurthi for one whole year, and he continued to clear their doubts through his compassionate answers.

Finally, Dakshinamurthi felt that if he continued to answer the questions more doubts would arise in their minds and there would never be an end to their ignorance (*ajnana)*. Therefore, suppressing the feeling of compassion and fatherly love, which was welling up within him, he merged himself into Supreme Silence.Because of their great maturity (which had got ripened greatly due to their year-long association with the *sadguru*), as soon as Dakshinamurthi assumed silence, they too got merged into Supreme Silence, the true state of Self.

When Muruganar, who was hearing the story, remarked that no book has mentioned about Dakshinamurthi ever speaking anything, Sri Ramana replied curtly, "But this is what actually happened." From the authoritative way in which Sri Ramana reacted, Muruganar realised that Sri Ramana was none other than Dakshinamurthi himself.

GLOSSARY OF NON-ENGLISH WORDS AND IMPORTANT SANSKRIT AND TAMIL BOOKS REFERRED TO IN THE TEXT

Abhishekam	Sacred bath
Advaita Vedanta	Philosophy of non-duality; the principal Hindu doctrine that nothing exists apart from Absolute *Brahman* (Supreme Spirit), which is the only ultimate reality, everything else being a form assumed by the spirit
Advaitic	Relating to Advaita philosophy
Advaitin	One who believes and follows the Advaita philosophy
Ahamkara	Egotism
Ajnana	Ignorance (of the Reality)
Amavasya	The last day of the dark fortnight of the lunar month
Ananda	Bliss, felicity, delight
Anugraha	Grace
Anupallavi	The middle part of a song
Arati	A ceremony performed in worshipping a god; a hymn or prayer addressed to a deity
Arunachala Siva	Mountain Arunachala in Tiruvannamalai, Tamil Nadu, which is considered by the devotees of Siva as Lord Siva Himself
Asana	Physical postures, the regular practice of which is a standard feature of many schools of yoga
Ashtanga namas-karam	Full prostration, where eight parts of the human body touch the floor
Ashrama	(i)Dwelling place of sages, yogis and their students and disciples; a forest retreat of sages. (ii) As per the Hindu tradition, hundred years of a person's life should ideally be lived in four equal parts, called *ashramas*, namely, *brahamacharya, grihasta*, *vanaprastha* and *sannyasa*
Atma siddhi	Attaining full control over the self
Atman	Soul, the immortal Self of all beings, which is a part of *Brahman*
Atma vidya	Knowledge of the soul and its relation to the Ultimate Being
Atma vichara	Reflection on the soul and its relation to the Ultimate Being; self examination
Atmanubhuti	Self realisation

Avatar	A divine manifestation; incarnation of God
Avidya	Spiritual ignorance that I am the body; want of learning
Bhagavan	The Supreme Being; any revered person
Bhajans	Devotional songs
Bhakta	A devotee
Bhakti	Love or devotion for the God incarnate
Bhakti marga	The path to God through love ãnd devotion
Bhiksha	Food received as alms; the giving of such food; the act of getting out to beg food
Bhikshu	Supplicant; mendicant
Brahmachari	A celibate student; one practising *brahmacharya*
Brahmacharya	Celibacy; the first Hindu stage of life in which in ancient times one studied under a religious teacher and remained single with all attention towards *Brahman.* (See *ashrama*)
Brahman	The designation in Hinduism for the impersonal Absolute Reality; the one formless, non-dual Absolute substratum of all that exists
Brahmananda	The joy of becoming one with the Absolute
Brahmin	Member of the priestly class among the Hindus; first of the four *varnas* (classes) among the Hindus
Brahmastra	An unfailing weapon
Buddhi	Wisdom, intelligence
Chit	Consciousness
Choultry	Place attached to temples/*maths* for providing shelter to devotees during their pilgrimage
Darshan	Literally 'sight'; silent audience; to have *darshan* of a sage; could be translated as to enjoy the grace of his presence
Dasarah	See *Vijayadasami*
Devanagari	The alphabets used for writing Sanskrit, Hindi and some other Indian languages
Dharma	Code of social and personal morality; the eternal laws of the cosmos inherent in the very nature of things
Dhal	(In Indian cookery) split pulses
Dhyana	Meditation; contemplation
Dhoti	A rectangular piece of cloth, about four meters long, worn by Indian men, wrapped around the waist
Diksha	Initiation
Ekadasi	The eleventh day of a lunar fortnight. Traditionally, the Hindus observe a fast on this day
Fakir	An ascetic (specially Muslim); beggar

Gayatri mantra — The most famous and sacred Vedic mantra

Ghee — Clarified butter used in Indian cooking

Giri-pradakshina — *Pradakshina* is the circuit that is made of any holy object or place, walking round with one's right side inward. *Giri* is hill. So, *giri-pradakshina* is going round the hill, which here refers to mountain Arunachala

Gopika /Gopis — The female cowherds of Vrandavan who played and danced with Lord Krishna; they are held to be paradigms of loving devotion

Goshala — Cow-shed

Grihastha — Householder; one who carries out obligations of domestic life

Grihastashrama — The second stage of life in the Hindu system, after *Brahmacharya*, and followed by *Vanaprastha* and *Sannyasa.* In this stage a person takes the responsibility of the family affairs. (See *ashrama*)

Gunas — The three fundamental qualities – *gunas* or tendencies which underlie all manifestations are: *sattva, rajas* and *tamas.* The *sattva* represents purity and is free from all evils. A *sattvic* person is wise, helpful and has equanimity. The *raja* is activity. A *rajasic* person relentlessly pursues his goals; he is ambitious. *Tamas* is born out of ignorance. It makes one work under the compulsion of the body, without applying power of judgment. A *tamasic* person is averse to work or activity. It is the mix of the *gunas* which differentiate one person from another

Guru — A spiritual teacher or preceptor (See also *sadguru*)

Hare — Vocative singular of the word Hari, which is a name for Vishnu and his incarnations

Harijans — A devotee of Hari (God); a term used by Mahatma Gandhi for untouchables among the Hindus

Hridaya — The heart, the spiritual center in the body on the right side of the chest. Some texts and Sri Ramana have suggested the heart as the appropriate point to meditate

Iddlies — Lens-shaped steamed cakes of ground rice and *dhal*, commonly eaten in South India

Indriyas — Senses

Iswara — The God Supreme

Jai — Victory

Japa — Repetition of a sacred word or syllable for invoking grace or vision of a deity, or for acquiring Self-knowledge

Jayanti	In this book, the birthday of Sri Ramana and the celebrations associated with it
Ji (Jee)	A Hindi honorific suffix added to a name to denote respect; a respectful form of address
Jivanmukta	One who is liberated while still alive; one who is not affected by the natural tendencies of a human being while living
Jnana	Divine knowledge; wisdom; inner awareness
Jnana marga	The path to God through knowledge and analysis of the self
Jnani	One who is established in the Absolute knowledge; an enlightened one
Kaivalya	Ultimate Realization, the state of liberation
Kamandalu	A water pot usually made from a coconut shell
Kaliyuga	Last of the four *yugas* (aeons) as per Hindu cosmology (See *yuga*)
Karika	A collection of philosophical verses
Karma	The destiny based on the law of cause and effect
Karma, jnana, and bhakti	Selfless action, true knowledge, and devotion – three important ways of Self-realization
Karma-yogi	The person who performs his/her duties sincerely without worrying about the results
Kaupina	Codpiece, loincloth
Kripa	Grace
Kumbhabhishekam	Consecration – the ceremony of consecrating. (To consecrate is to make or declare as sacred.)
Kumkum	Red powder used as cosmetic bindi on the forehead or between the eyebrows
Kundalini (sakti)	A psycho-spiritual force that lies dormant at the base of the spinal cord until activated by yogic practices. Conceived as a coiled snake by the yogis, it uncoils and rises up the spine reaching up to the crown of the head, resulting in *samadhi*
Kural	(Tirukkural) Ancient Tamil classic
Lila (Leela)	Sport, play of God
Linga (m)	A round vertical column of stone with rounded upper end, which is installed in Siva temples and is regarded as a physical manifestation of the deity
Mahanirvana	Deliverance from re-birth of an enlightened being like Sri Ramana Maharshi or the Buddha
Mahaprasadam	See *prasada*
Mahapurusha	A great man

Maharshi	A great Hindu sage; literally, a great soul
Mahatma	A holy person or sage; also a title as in Mahatma Gandhi
Mahasamadhi	Physical death of a great saint
Mandapam	A bare hall, with or without the image of God
Mantra	A sacred word or phrase given to a disciple by the guru. (Repetition of the mantra is one of common forms of *sadhana.*)
Math/Matham	A Hindu centre or institution, often monastic in nature, set up for honouring the memory of a saint, or for singing *bhajans,* giving out teachings, etc.
Maya	Illusion; the power that makes the unreal world appear real
Maunam	Silence; a synonym for the throught-free experience of the Self
Mauna mudra	To be in a silent posture
Mukta	Those who get released from the cycle of rebirth
Mukti, Moksha	Deliverance; in Indian philosophy, release from the cycle of rebirth
Muni	A seer, a sage
Munshi	A language teacher or a secretary
Munsif	A subordinate judge in India
Namaskaram	Salutations; a traditional Indian gesture of greeting made by bringing the palms together before the chest and bowing
Navaratri	The first nine days of the light half of month Ashwin, during which goddess Durga is worshipped
Nirvana	Extinction; deliverance from repeated births
Nirvikalpa samadhi	The supreme super-conscious state; great ecstasy
Nishtha	Devotion, allegiance
Om	According to the Hindus it is the primordial sound from which all creation springs. (It is an important element in all mantras of Hinduism.)
Padmasana	A particular sitting posture for meditation
Pada puja	A ritual of worshipping the feet of guru as an act of veneration
Pandal	A large temporary shed erected at the time of a function or festival
Papadam/pappadam	A deep-fried crunchy round wafer
Parayana	Singing or chanting from sacred texts. Literally, chanting up to the end of the text
Pongal	A South Indian dish of rice and *dhal* cooked with

	various spices
Pradakshina	See *giri pradakshina*
Prana	The breath of life; the spirit or soul as opposed to the body
Pranams	Salutations
Pranayama	A system of breathing exercises
Prarabdha	Fate; destiny
Prarthana	Prayer; earnest request; entreaty
Prasada / prasadam	A sanctified present; food offered to a deity or guru, a part of which is returned to the devotee who has offered it
Puja/pooja	Ritualistic worship performed by the Hindus
Puranas	Works dealing with Hindu mythology; literally, ancient or old
Puranic	Mythological
Puris (pooris)	A small, round, flat piece of unleavened flour, which is deep-fried
Purusha	The spirit (*Atma/atman*). It is used more in the masculine sense where Spirit is contrasted or coupled with Substance (*Prakriti)*
Rishi	A sage, a seer
Rasam	A spiced liquid prepared with peper and temarind served at most South Indian meals
Sadasiva	Lord Siva
Sadhaka	Spiritual aspirant or seeker; one who does *sadhana*
Sadhana	Conscious spiritual exercise or quest; the technique of spiritual effort
Sadhu	One who has renounced home and property in quest of God
Sadguru	Literally 'true teacher'; a fully enlightened guru; the highest of gurus
Sahaja samadhi	Continuous *samadhi*, not requiring trance or ecstasy but compatible with full use of human faculties
Sakama tapasya	Penance undertaken to fulfill worldly desires
Sakti/shakti	In spiritual context – divine power
Samadhi	(i) Absorption in the Spirit of Self with or without trance; (ii) Tomb of a saint
Samatva	The practice of treating all equally; seeing all alike as manifestation of the Spirit
Sambhar	A spicy liquid preparation made from *dhal* and cut vegetables that accompanies South Indian meals
Samsaric	Worldly
Samskaras	Mental habits and tendencies particularly those which have been carried forward from previous births

Samsara	The cares and burdens of mundane life; the phenomenal world of names and forms, especially as it appears to the unenlightened mind
Sanatana	Eternal
Sannyasa	The fourth *ashrama* or stage of life in which one completely renounces the world and all one's relationships, and in which one lives as a monk. (See *ashrama*)
Sannyasi/n	One who has renounced the world
Sarvadhikari	The chief manager. It was the title of the administrative head of Sri Ramanasramam for many years
Saranagati	Total surrender to God or a person
Sat	Truth
Satchidananda	The God Supreme – the one who combines in itself Truth (*Sat),* Consciousness (*Chit*), and Bliss (*Ananda)*
Satsanga	Literally, 'fellowship or company with truth'; the conversation and/or company of a saint; the group of seekers who form such a company
Sattvic	The quality of truth, goodness and purity (in a person)
Sattva, rajas and tamas	See *gunas*
Sastra	Scriptures
Shastipurti	Sixtieth birthday celebrations
Sivalinga	See *lingam*
Siddhi	Supernatural power
Siddha (purusha)	One who has supernatural powers whether or not he has spiritual attainment
Sloka	A stanza or verse in Sanskrit literature/ texts
Sri	Literally, 'the auspicious one'; used as an honorific prefix for men. It also denotes the Divine Mother Lakshmi, the consort of Lord Vishnu
Sthitaprajna	Firm in wisdom; fully contented
Swami	One's own master; a spiritual guru; used as a respectful term for monks
Swaraj	Independence
Swabhava	Nature; temperament
Swanubhava	Self-determination
Thailadhara	Continuous flow like oil being poured from one vessel to another. The simile is often used for the state of uninterrupted meditation
Tapas / tapasya	Literally, 'heat'. Arduous spiritual practices often involving bodily mortification. It is our deep-rooted

	conviction that severe restraint or discipline (psychological heat) is needed for transformation
Tattva jnani	One who knows the Reality behind the things
Thevaram	Songs written by Tamil saints in praise of Lord Siva
Tonga	A light horse-drawn two-wheeled vehicle
Upadesa	Spiritual instruction
Upanishadic	Relating to Upanishads
Upavasam	Fast – abstaining from food/drink
Upma (uppuma)	A dish made from semolina (*rava*), spices and a small amount of vegetables
Vasana	Habit of the mind; latent tendency
Vaishnavite	A devotee of Lord Vishnu
Veda parayana	Chanting of the Vedas, which are the oldest and most respected scriptures of Hinduism. (See also *parayana)*
Vichara	Thought, reflection
Vichara marga	A path for self-realization through intelligent questioning about one's true nature
Vibhuti	Holy ash; it is applied to the forehead and smeared to the body. Some people also eat a small pinch of it as *prasada*
Vibhuti kumkum prasada(m)	Two very small packets of paper containing the holy ash and the red powder used for bindi on the forehead, given to the devotees as Sri Ramana's *prasada* at Sri Ramanasramam. (*Bindi* is a decorative mark worn in the middle of the eyebrows or on the forehead by the Hindus, particularly by the Hindu women.)
Vidvan	A scholarly person
Vijayadasmi	The tenth day of the light half of the Hindu month Aswin, on which the festival celebrating the victory of Lord Rama over Ravana is held
Yatra	Pilgrimage
Yoga	The discipline aimed at training the consciousness for state of perfect spiritual insight and union with the Universal Spirit
Yogi	One who practises yoga; a spiritually advanced or freed soul
Yuga(s)	A sub-division of *kalpa,* which consists of millions of years. In Hindu cosmology a *kalpa* is a period for which the manifest universe lasts prior to its dissolution. Each *kalpa* has four *yugas*: the *Satya*, the *Treta*, the *Dvapara* and the *Kali.*

BOOKS

Aksharamanamalai The 108-verse poem in Tamil addressed to the hill Arunachala. *Arunachala Aksharamanamalai* means 'the bridal garland of letters for Arunachala'. It is a fine example of bridal mysticism. Here Sri Ramana employs the intimate language of love conversing with the Lord. He also pines for, cajoles, chides, and quarrels with his Beloved Arunachala. The poem was composed by Sri Ramana in 1913, while he was making the 13 km circuit round the hill.

Arunachala-Ashtakam Eight verses on Arunachala composed by Sri Ramana in Tamil.

Bhagavatam Also known as *Bhagavata Puranam*. This Sanskrit work attributed to the great Sage Vyasa contains extensive stories about Lord Krishna's early life and also some episodes concerning Lord Vishnu.

Brahma Sutra Composed by the great sage Vyas, it contains 555 aphorisms, mostly dealing with soul, universe and the Supreme Consciousness.

Chatvarimsat A collection of 40 Sanskrit verses in praise of Sri Ramana by Ganapati Muni (no.91).

Gita/Bhagavat Gita Literally, 'song of God'. This most famous sacred text of Hinduism consists of teachings by Lord Krishna to Arjuna on the battlefield of Kurukshetra in the *Mahabharata.*

Kaivalya Nava-neetha An Advaitic work in Tamil by Thandavaraya Swami considered to be composed in fourteenth century.

Nirvanashtaka Famous six *slokas* of Adi Sankra meant to get deliverance from rebirth.

Ramana Stuti Panchakam A collection of five sets of Tamil verses in praise of Sri Ramana by one Satyamangalam Venkatarama Iyer.

Ribhu Gita It is an ancient Sanskrit work which brings out the essence of advita. It is presented as spiritual instructions from sage Ribhu to his disciple Nidaga.

Sat Darsana A Sanskrit rendering of Sri Ramana's *Ulladu Narpadu* by Ganapati Muni. (See *Ulladu Narpadu)*

Sivananda Lahari A work by Adi Sankara in praise of Lord Siva.

Sri Ramana Anubhuti A Tamil work by the great poet Muruganar (no.53) which describes 'experiencing Sri Ramana'.

Sri Ramana Gita	A Sanskrit work by Ganapati Muni with eighteen chapters like the *Gita*. It covers essential teachings of Sri Ramana.
Ulladu Narpadu	Forty verses on 'That which is' – Tamil verses by Sri Ramana on Reality. (See *Sat Darsana)*
Uma Sahasram	A Sanskrit work by Ganapati Muni containing 1000 verses in praise of goddess Uma.
Upadesa Undiyar / Upadesa Saaram	The Tamil work by Sri Ramana containing instructions to realize the Self. This work was later rendered into Sanskrit, Telugu and Malayalam by Sri Ramana himself.
Yoga Vasistha/ Vasistham	The book contains a dialogue between Sage Vasistha and Lord Rama during which Advaita is expounded, illustrated profusely with stories. Sri Ramana used to refer the book frequently, and has incorporated nine verses from it in his *Reality in Forty Verses: Supplement.*
Viveka Chudamani	A popular Advaitic work by Adi Sankara which literally means 'The Crest Jewel of Discrimination'.

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Ibid. – means 'ditto', that is, the same source as just above.
Op.cit. – means that full citation has been given earlier.

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ACCOLADES SHOWERED UPON SRI RAMANA

(A page-wise list)

The following encomiums bestowed on Sri Ramana Maharshi by the various contributors, appear to be beyond the extraordinary. It seems doubtful whether any other person in recorded history ever got similar adulations in his lifetime or within a few decades thereafter. The contributors have attempted to describe in myriad ways the indescribable Truth, which Sri Ramana was. The Maharshi exemplifies Einstein's historic tribute to Mahatma Gandhi: "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth." No wonder that the Maharshi is envisioned by the contributors as the highest pinnacle of Truth and Wisdom towards which humanity will strive to move for generations to come.

A spiritual superman, 18
He is eloquent enough without opening his lips, 20
Possesses a deific personality which defies description, 21
The silent flavour of spirituality emanating from him was unstoppable, 21
Each phrase that fell from his lips seemed to contain some precious fragment of essential truth, 21
A visitor from another planet, 22
A being of another species, 22
Best philosophers of Europe could not hold a candle to him, 22
A pure channel for the higher power, 23
A spiritual torch, 23
Immortality stands out from his every word and look, 25
I had come in touch with spiritualism of the finest type, 27
His very presence generates an atmosphere of peace, 28
He was the Truth and the Light, 29
He is gentle to a degree that surpasses gentleness, 30
Hercules among the yogis, 31
Greatness sat easily on him, 32
Provides peace which is as unaccountable as it is delectable, 32
His detachment was as complete as it was perfect, 33
Nothing seems to possess the power to disturb his super poise, his marvellous tranquility and peace, 33
He represents a very perfect instance of the Ego-less state, 34
He is a veritable storehouse of spiritual energy and wisdom, 34
His silence is more eloquent than his speech, 34

To be in his presence is a stirring experience in the elevation of the soul, 35
When he smiled it was as though the gates of heaven were thrown open, 35
He is an ocean of tranquility, 37
Peace in his presence passeth all understanding, 37
He touches you by a fourth-dimensional touch, 37
He is a living example of knowledge without which the humanity of today is but a pitiful joke, 40
He relies on action-less action and carries on a wordless teaching, 40
He renders the Truth demonstrable, 41
He is a perfect example of a *jivanmukta,* 41
He is a *mahadhi* – the man of the highest intellect, 42
His omniscience is constant and remains undiminished, 42
The world-intoxicated mind becomes subdued, calm, and purified in his holy presence, 43
The *darshan* of the Sage is an experience in itself, not capable of being described, 44
His greatness is based on his actual living by the creed of Advaita Vedanta, 46
The whole humanity owes its homage to this great sage, 47
A divine master endowed with all spiritual and human qualities, 48
His silence is more eloquent, more effective, more far-reaching than the sermons of any number of teachers put together, 48
He is the greatest of modern sages of India, 49
He is a sublime example of what a sage ought to be, 50
He is like the rivers and mountains, the common property of mankind, 50
He was a consummate artist in life, 52
If not God himself – for He is omnipresent – the Maharshi is at least Greatness incarnate, 54
The Maharshi's grace can plunge the ordinary man in the ecstasy of timeless Omnipresent Being, 55
His very presence among us is a benediction, 55
A silent look or an encouraging word from him will do more good than all the sermonic literature of the world, 57
It is easy to remember but impossible to know the Maharshi, 58
Whether indifferent or sympathetic, in either case the world gains by him, 58
Whatever may be written about the Maharshi, there is no such thing as knowing him, 59
Divinity and grace radiated from the countenance of the Sage, 62
Being with him is being elevated, 69
The Divine Power of his presence was something remarkable, entirely outstanding, 70
Just to think of him or sit in his presence would raise us to higher levels of blessedness, 70

In Sri Ramana the sublime majesty of the divine life stood and moved in all simplicity, 75
In the Maharshi the ultimate had revealed itself as immediate, and the undreamt had become the actual, 76
He was a beacon light in an otherwise impenetrable darkness and a haven of peace, 79
He was Supreme Detachment incarnate, 79
Renunciation was the 'completest' with him, 80
His mere presence conferred blessedness upon those near him, 82
My heart was being irresistibly attracted as though by a mighty spiritual magnet towards that divinity in human form, 85
For the first time in my life, I began to understand what the grace and blessings of a guru could mean, 97
He was Divine Grace in human form, 98
He was indeed the universal guru, 98
His graciousness awoke a feeling of guilt as to how great was the reward for so little effort made, 99
His face was wreathed in the most lovely smiles, with an expression of serenity and beauty on it which is impossible to describe, or even believe unless you have seen it yourself, 115
He was a perfect Impersonality like the sun in the sky or like the unnoticed daylight in an inner chamber, 118
The Supreme Lord has assumed a human body as an act of grace and resides at Arunachala under the name of Ramana, 126
Gurus like the Maharshi are manifestations of God in human form. To relieve and redeem the suffering of mankind, the Lord occasionally comes down to earth and manifests in a physical form, 143
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He was so great yet so simple, 159
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The Maharshi undoubtedly was one of those rare *mahatmas* who had the power to banish the suffering through his presence, merely through giving *darshan,* 166
His look and smile had a remarkable charm. When he spoke, the words seem to come out of an abyss. In his presence the unique bliss of peace was directly experienced, 172

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Effort seemed redundant when his presence alone was enough to evaporate the usual mental flow of thoughts, ideas and problems, 198
How can his smile be described? It contained the whole world, 200
The Maharshi is unimaginable and therefore indescribable, 200
He was a bomb that exploded the myth of my life, 200
He enabled me to realize the timeless, unimaginable, unthinkable 'I am', 200
Whatever transformation took place in his presence, happened on its own accord, not because he desired or willed it. Darkness was exposed to light and ceased to be dark. Light did not orchestrate it in any way, 201
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He reigns in silence, 206
The Maharshi's spiritual alchemy could transmute the hard materialism into something pure and noble, 206
He is like the highest tribunal of our conscience, the Father Confessor whose very presence purifies us of all sins, 207
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an astrologer); 316 (solace to lady seeking life for dead son); 321-2 (unique kitchen garden party); 324 (his way of rectifying a wrong); 325 (a prince gets overwhelmed); 331 (recital of Sanskrit verses in his praise); 332 (foreign seeker gets subdued and transformed); 326 (devotee gets a sample of his handwriting); 338 (tackles an inconvenient visitor); 344-5 (suggests medicine for his own hiccups); 357 (concern for an infant); 359 (didn't like even lice to be killed); 359 (humaneness towards a German lady); 381 (tackles an overbearing officer); 389 (two-year boy holds him back); 408 (saves a dove)

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Tiruvannamalai); 239 (seven-year child gets into trance); 240 (snake-bite cured); 241-2 (critical guidance provided in a far off place); 249 (dyspepsia and sores get cured); 250 (two-year child goes into trance); 255 & 313 (mundane desires disappear); 262 (rain stops for cremation); 262 (suitable match found); 268-9 (child recovers from disease); 271 (daughter's marriage gets facilitated); 287 (provides desired vision); 288 (surprise for a couple from Peru); 292 (brief disappearance from couch); 306 (eyesight restored); 311 (transforms diffidence into confidence); 313 (provides desired vision); 313-4 (devotees' visit to Ashram facilitated); 315 (life protected from sudden attack); 323-4 (finger and elbow pain gets cured); 330-1(visit to Pondicherry made possible); 333-4 (sciatica gets cured); 336 (brinjals arrive at Ashram); 337 (help in securing a job); 345-6 (smooth delivery for devotee's wife); 346 (help in having train ticket); 346 (issueless lady gets children); 350-1 (eyesight restored); 351 (needed food items arrive at odd hour); 364 (transfer gets cancelled); 367 (gets vision in train); 367-8 (starving faces get smile); 377 (physical ailments disappear); 383-4 (devotee experiences the Self); 385 (a ten-year's affinity to M); 390 (desired vision provided); 392 (dying devotee gets cured); 392 (translation work gets completed); 393-4 (hunter of peacock gets punished); 395 (help during *giri pradakshina)*; 403 (snake-bitten child saved); 407 (smooth delivery gets effected)

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devotee's mind); 246 & 247 (everyone an open book to him); 267-8 (knew about hindrance in undertaking journey); 270 (answers a mental query); 284 (foresees world war); 303 (awareness about devotee's thought); 305 (insight about devotee's great potential); 330-1 (predicts devotee's travel plan); 342 (anticipates visitor's need); 355 (knew the nativity of devotee's wife); 363-4 (knew reason for devotee's absence); *see also*, 'Telepathic power of M'

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Peace in M's presence: 14 (untellable); 28 (generated by itself); 37 (passeth all comprehension); 53 (radiant); 102 (provided a state of ecstasy); 111 (continuous and tremendous); 151 (as never experienced before); 205 & 295 (beyond all understanding)

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Personal attributes of M: 17, 319 & 344 (reticent by nature); 30 (gentle to a degree surpassing gentleness); 97 (modest, utterly simple, childlike defencelessness); 110 (never touched money); 110 (never raised voice); 111 (scrupulously clean); 149 (replies cogent, not assertive); 359 (incomparable compassion and love, never got angry, never saw anything wrong). Usually spoke with a smile on lips, *see,* 'Speech of M'. *See also,* 'Waste avoidance'

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spreading rays of burnished gold); 265 (golden skin); 276 (pale gold ivory figure, face of a child); 283 (eyes – grey or brown?); 285 (a statue of burnished gold); 302 (like glorious sunrise); 318 (a golden brown figure with most radiant countenance); 319 (countenance – intense, transparent, childlike); 326 (limbs well proportioned, well knit and long, skin smooth and glowing, head quivering, inclined towards the right); 343 (face radiated endless love and serenity); 378 (face translucent as if lit by an inner illumination); 381 (body shone like burnished gold, face radiated mysterious light); 384 (body luminous like burnished gold); 391 (radiated spiritual aura); 396 (lustrous body, shinning eye, halting gait); 399 (radiated love and simplicity); 400 (indescribable radiance on face); 402 (body extremely weak, face shone radiant with peace)

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* * *

Face to Face with Sri Ramana Maharshi

The book presents a varied collection of inspiring and spiritually-elevating accounts by 202 persons, including 33 foreigners from across the globe, who visited / interacted with Sri Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950) or had an opportunity to serve / live with him. Each contribution is singular and sheds invaluable light on the uniqueness of the Maharshi.

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